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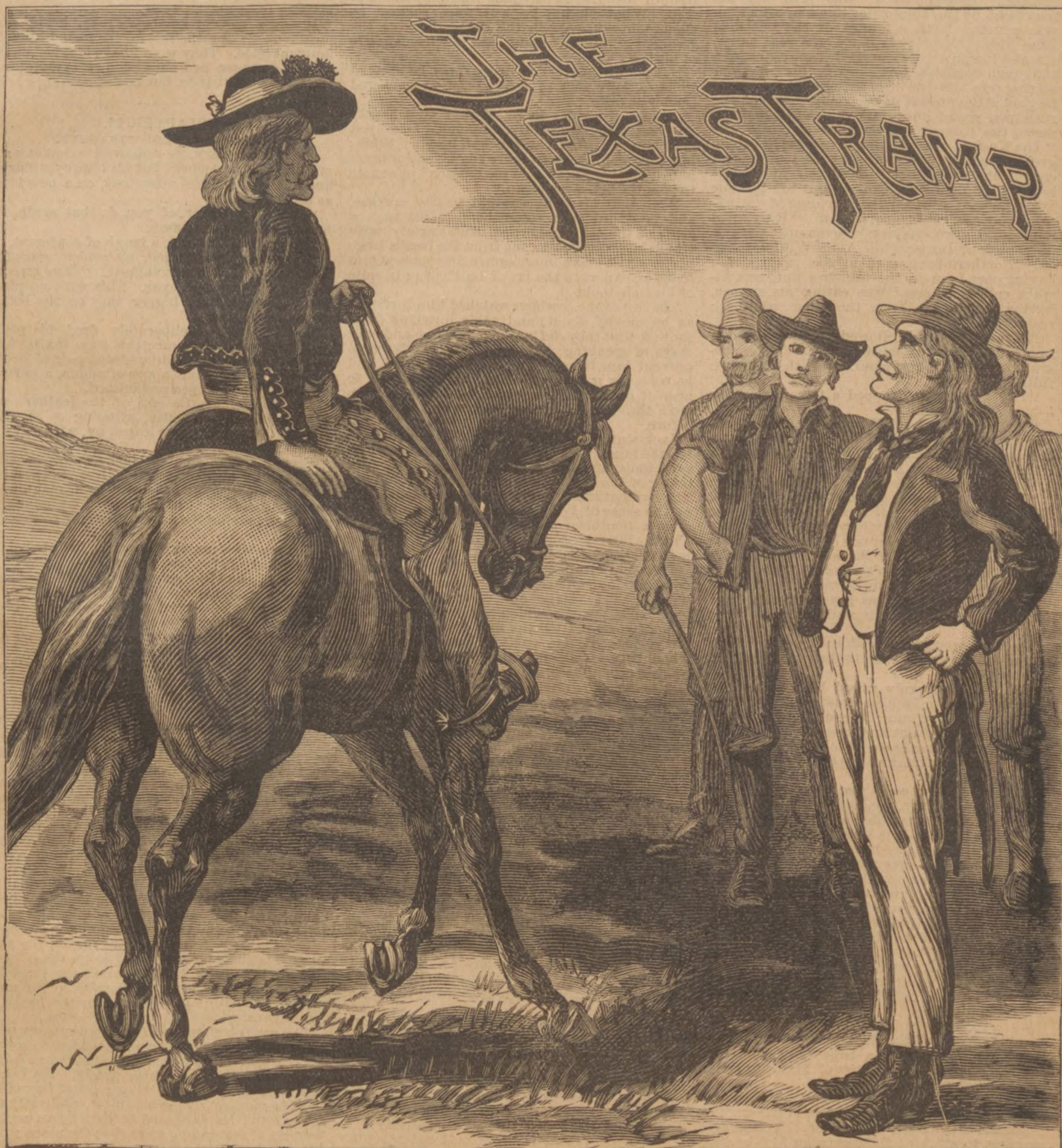
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"THROW A STEER! WHY, MAN, I'M THE ONLY BOY IN OUR PARTS THAT EVER DID THROW A STEER, FAIR AND SQUARE."

The Texas Tramp;

OR,
SOLID SOL,
THE YANKEE HERCULES.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "PARSON JIM," "SITTING BULL,"
"THE RED MONARCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A TRAMP ON THE RANGE.

OUT on the range, the day's work had been done; the cattle were all within bounds; the night was fine, with no fears of a norther or any disturbance to bring the men out of their beds—such as they were; and, as a consequence, the herders of the Mesquite Ranch were gathered round a fire, in front of the apology for a dwelling which was dignified by the title of the "ranch-house," telling stories and amusing themselves, after their wont.

Little Tom Gray, better known as "Gray Pepper," from the quickness of his temper, had just finished singing a long and mournful melody about the fortunes of a certain young man who lost his lady-love and his life, by the cruelty of a high-born father, in medieval times.

"Pistol" Jim, who had earned his name from his readiness to use his weapons, was mending the girth of his spare saddle, with a thong of leather; "Roaring Jack" was justifying his nickname by the stentorian tones in which he was pouring forth a stanza of the "Bonnie Blue Flag"; "Curley Pink," whose real name, Charles Pinckney, was altogether too refined for the rough cowboys, was smoking his pipe and staring into the fire in a thoughtful way, as if he took little interest in the conversation of the rude men round him; dark-skinned Miguel Romero, the *vaguer*, whose *alias* in camp was "The Knifer," was plaiting a new lariat of the greased leather that he always used in preference to the ropes that sufficed the other cowboys; "Dandy Joe" Thomson and his brother Ike, who had obtained the *sobriquet* of "Ring-tail," as an abbreviation of "Ringtailed Squealer," were playing "seven-up" with a dirty pack of cards; while Amos Whelpley, the only Northern-born man in the party, who, having once been in the minstrel line, was always called "Bones," was eating his supper, having come in late from the range, when the rest had finished.

Roaring Jack had bellowed his stanza, and a lull came over the musical part of the programme, when Bones remarked, with his mouth full:

"Say, boys, train dropped a tramp, cloc't by—blamed ef it didn't."

"A tramp!" echoed Pepper, his brows contracting at once. "Why didn't some one put a hole in him? Ef thar's a thing I can't abide, it's a tramp. From the No'th of course?"

Whelpley bolted his mouthful of beef, to say: "In course. Hain't got no tramps in Taxes. Stole rides, he says, all the way through the Tarritry" (Indian Territory), "and the conductor faound him under one of the keers, whar he'd b'en hangin' on, fur the last hunnerd miles or so. Say, boys, shedn't wonder ef the skunk come hyar. I seen him, arter they dropped him, and he's as green as grass. Comes from New Hampshire, he says, and wants to be a cowboy."

The news seemed to produce opposite effects on the cowboys, according to their temperament and training.

Curley Pink merely raised his eyes and let them drop again; Pepper, Dandy Joe and Ring-tail burst out laughing; Miguel Romero ceased his plaiting a moment and sneered bitterly, his black eyes glowing like coals of fire; while Pistol Jim made an imaginary point with his forefinger, remarking:

"Ef he comes, we'll jest have the tallest kinder fun with him, you bet."

Roaring Jack was filling his pipe, rather discomfited at the silence in which his last song had been received, and he made no remark.

It was just as Bones resumed his supper, that a stir was heard among the cattle, and, in a moment, every cowboy was on his feet, peering out into the darkness, while the men whose duty it was to be on guard walked toward their ponies, ready to mount if the disturbance increased.

Then Bones looked up from his supper, to say: "It's the tramp, boys. I knowed he'd come. He ain't had a squar' meal fur a month, from the looks of him, I shed say. I thought the fire 'ud fetch him."

As he spoke, they descried a figure coming toward them out of the darkness, while a voice, that resembled that of a baby giant, from the contradictory characteristics of high pitch and great power, cried out:

"So, bossy! So! Good bossy! Ain't goin' to hurt none of ye, darn yer stoopid picters!"

For the cattle near the fire were fidgeting and running to stare at the figure on foot among them, such a sight being rarer than a black

swan in Texas, where all the herders are mounted.

The cowboys as soon as they had ascertained the character of the disturbance returned to their places by the fire, and resumed their seats in a churlish and inhospitable fashion very different from their ordinary way of behavior.

The tale told by Whelpley had prejudiced them all against the stranger. He was a Yankee from the State of New Hampshire, a tramp and a beggar. What more could they want to make them dislike him?

Of the eight cowboys round the fire, seven had been Rangers under Magruder, and the eighth—Whelpley—hated a Yankee worse than any of the ex-soldiers. It was only a few years after the peace, and the State of Texas was full of "irreconcilables," and the county in which Mesquite Ranch was situated, it was said, had run every Yankee out that had dared to come in, and here was another coming when they thought they had got rid of them forever.

So they merely scowled as the stranger came forward among them.

The only man in the party that favored him with a glance of anything like good nature was Curley Pink, who nodded to him as he stood there, and said, with a gesture toward the carcass of beef that hung near the fire:

"Take a cut, sir. You look as if you were hungry."

Indeed the stranger did look hungry, for his eyes were sunken in the midst of a face pale from long fasting, and had a wolfish glare about them that spoke louder than words.

He seemed, as far as they could see in the light of the fire, to be young and very tall and thin. What clothes he had were ragged, as they could see, even in the darkness, from the frequent glimpses of white skin in various parts of his body and limbs.

But for all his forlorn appearance he seemed to be a jolly sort of fellow, for he answered Curley at once:

"Waal, I wanter know ef that ain't hearty an' free! Thankee kindly, stranger. I feel jest that empty I c'u'd eat the hull beast, I think; but I guess I'll have to leave the bones fur manners. Mother allers told me it warn't manners to pick the bones too clean."

With that he went straight to the carcass, and produced from somewhere in his rags a knife of the old buckhorned, clasp variety, with which he proceeded to cut from the beef a huge porter-house steak in a manner that showed him to be an expert in the art of butchering in spite of his rude tools.

The rest of the cowboys watched him furtively as he moved about, and their lowering faces showed that they did not like his free-and-easy ways of speaking; but none of them offered to prevent him from doing what he wanted, and he took his meat to the fire and proceeded to broil it on a gridiron which he coolly took up from the side of Roaring Jack, who had used it before.

Jack stared at him in a way that would have terrified most men; but the stranger showed no symptoms of fear, and the cowboy thought better of his first impulse to snatch it from him. The evident hunger of the new-comer appealed to the sense of sympathy of all there, and even a rank Southern cowboy, though he hated a Yankee bitterly, could not fight with a starving man till he had eaten.

This the stranger proceeded to do with a voracity that amazed even the cowboys, who were used to large appetites. They silently watched the way in which pound after pound of beef disappeared till the new-comer must have put away some five or six of good, hard meat, when Pepper suddenly burst out, as if he could not restrain himself any longer:

"Geerusalem cricket! haow much more air you gwine to cram, you Yankee hog!"

Then the young man—for they could see that he was quite young and beardless—turned on his interrogator:

"Stranger," he said, gravely, "it ain't count-ed manners in aour parts to make no remarks on the wittles a man eats, fur fear folks might say we gruded 'em to him."

Pepper was a little, dried-up man, who weighed about a hundred and fifteen pounds. He was near the stranger, and now he eyed him all over, as if taking his measure. He saw a frame of a size that was amazing, for the strange youth if he had stood up would have measured at least six feet and two or three inches in his stockings had he possessed such luxuries. He was thin to be sure, but that was from long privation, and the skeleton which supported his flesh was of a size that promised a giant had it been well covered. His face was that of a simple, innocent boy, full of high spirits and devoid of guile.

His long flaxen hair, on either side of a long nose and big, good-natured mouth, hung down unkempt and straggling; evidently so worn, from no vanity, but from lack of a barber to perform the necessary cutting.

This simple-looking young giant stared at Pepper, and the small Texan returned the stare. Then Pepper said, in a slow, drawling way:

"Your parts? And whar in thunder is your parts, whar they has sich manners?"

The young stranger heard the sneering intonation and looked all over Pepper's diminutive form; a smile gradually breaking out over his quizzical face, as he answered:

"My parts, d'ye wanter know? Waal, whar I come from, they raises 'skeeters as big as you, and the children kills 'em fur fun."

The moment he had spoken, there was a laugh from all the cowboys, save Pepper; for they enjoyed fun, at whoever's expense it might be; while the little Texan flushed slightly, for he prided himself on his powers of repartee.

"I reckon," he said, in the same slow, drawling way as before, "that the 'skeeters in that part of the country hain't got no stings, stranger. In Taxes they hev. D'ye see these 'ere?"

He was sitting on the other side of the fire; and, as he spoke, he drew one of his pistols from his belt, and cocked it, grimly continuing: "Now, look-a-hyar, stranger. You air a hefty feller, as fur as size goes; but you hain't been in Taxes long enough to talk to aour boys. I'll excuse it for this time; but don't you do it again, ef ye don't wanter git laid aout."

The big young man stared at Pepper, as if he did not clearly understand what he meant.

"Say," he asked innocently, "do you mean you'd shoot a man for a little fun?"

Pepper laughed, and took deliberate aim at the top of the youthful giant's head.

"You hain't had yer ha'r cut fur some time," he said. "P'r'aps, ef I cut yer comb fur ye, ye'll know better'n to try and teach me manners."

And with that he let drive, the shot going through the shock of yellow hair on the scalp of the young stranger, and knocking off the apology for a hat he wore.

It was a regular cowboy's joke, brutal and unprovoked; but the rest of the men began to laugh at once. They would have laughed more, if the stranger had showed any symptom of fright or disturbance, but he did nothing of the sort.

CHAPTER II.

AN ASTONISHING STRANGER.

ON the contrary, he remained as quiet as if nothing had happened; but his blue eyes blazed, and his high-pitched voice took on a new tone, as he remarked:

"Say, little feller, ef you do that again, I'll have to give you a lesson."

Pepper burst out into a laugh of contempt.

"You, ye long-legged, slab-sided son of a Yankee peddler!" he exclaimed. "You give me a lesson! Don't talk hyar. This ain't no place fur Yanks; and the bigger they be, the better targets they makes."

With that, he deliberately fired his pistol again at the young man; this time taking aim at what was left of a dilapidated pair of boots, between the sole and upper of which, a permanent divorce had been proclaimed.

The bullet cut the end of the leather and grazed the skin slightly, stinging so sharply that the young stranger leaped up, with a cry of pain.

Pepper was on his feet just as soon, cocking his pistol for a third shot; for there was nothing in which he delighted so much as in plaguing a man by shooting at him, till he got him angry, and then making the anger an excuse to shoot in earnest.

But the big stranger, though he had shown his good-nature at the first shot, did not seem to be disposed to be killed or wounded, if he had any choice in the matter.

As soon as he leaped up, he made a tremendous spring across the fire, and dodged to one side as Pepper fired, with an agility that no one would have expected from his huge frame.

The shot missed, and before Pepper could repeat it, the grasp of the giant was on his wrist, and the little man had been caught up, as if he had been a child.

One quick wrench, and the pistol was sent flying into the darkness; another, and Pepper's other pistol was caught out of his holster, and sent after the first. Then the young giant flung him across his knee, as if Pepper had been a boy of five years old, and proceeded to administer such a spanking as the other had never received in all his life, since he left his mother.

The whole transaction took place so quickly that the other cowboys had no time to interfere, before Pepper was being executed; and then the ludicrous aspect of the thing struck them so forcibly that a roar of laughter rung out from them all. They could enjoy a joke at the expense of Pepper, as well as that of the stranger.

Not that it was any laughing matter for Pepper. The little man was grit to the back-bone, and such a quick shot that he made himself a sort of terror in the camp, in spite of his small size; but this time he had got into the hands of one who cared nothing for his shooting.

The cowboy struggled frantically to escape or to get some sort of revenge. He tried to get at his knife, but that was snatched with one hand, while the other held him firmly. He bit, or tried to bite, but the young giant forced his head to one side, under his elbow, while with the other hand he continued to rain down such a battery of resounding slaps that the place rung. The cowboys looked on, roaring with laughter

at first, but, as the punishment proceeded, their laughter gave way to wonder at the enormous strength displayed by the big youth.

Pepper was stoical, as far as complaint was concerned, for he uttered no cries for some time, but the strange young man continuing to spank like a machine, at last even the courage of Pepper broke down, and he began to shout for help.

The stranger looked round.

"Ef you don't want see this man killed, let him be," he said, with the first approach to a frown they had seen on his broad, innocent face. "I'm a-goin' to make him holler, or I'm a-goin' to holler myself. He begun it, ye know."

And this appeal to fair play had its effect on the cowboys, for they did not attempt to stir to Pepper's help, and the stranger continued his castigation, taking off for the purpose the very shoe on which Pepper had inflicted the indignity. The change from his hand to hard leather had its effect after awhile, for all the time that he was spanking away he was speaking, as if he had been a pedagogue at work.

"You'll do that again, will yer, you sassy imp? Take that! You'll show sich manners as that, will ye? Take that, and that!"

And so on, till at last the fortitude of the small cowboy gave way after he found that his friends would not come to his help, and he began to roar:

"Enough! Enough!"

The moment he did that, his formidable antagonist suspended his fustigation, to demand in the same tone as before:

"Will ye ever do it again? Say? say?"

At each word he gave a resounding spank with the sole of the shoe, and Pepper, who was completely broken down at last, could only roar at the top of his voice:

"NO! NO! NO!!!"

Then the young man released him with the parting remark:

"The next time you go to takin' liberties with Sol Piper, remember that bad manners is allers to be punished. I hain't taught school fur nothen, I kin tell ye. Manners is to be kept up, no matter what else ye do, boys."

He concluded with an agreeable smile, as he looked around.

As for Pepper, the doughty little cowboy, after he had been released, stood staring at the giant who had humiliated him so signally for a moment, as if he could hardly believe his senses, and then, with a muttered oath, started off into the darkness to find his pistols.

But the innocent-looking young stranger had not taken his eye off him, and no sooner did the little man start off than the big one was after him, and in two strides caught him.

Then he dragged him back to the fire before all the men, and demanded:

"Where was you a-goin' to—say?"

Pepper made no answer, but turned an appealing glance at his friends.

The appeal had its effect, for Roaring Jack at once started up and said, with his hand on his pistol-butt:

"Look-a-hyar, stranger, you've did enough. That man ain't able fur you with his fists; and you ought to give him a squar' chance to fight ye. Let him have his pistols, and I'll lend ye one myself. We ain't used to this sort of thing."

The stranger looked round, and his face was grave and earnest as he said:

"Boys, I'm a stranger here, and only want a fair show. In aour parts they ain't used to pistols. This man sot on me first, and if I let him go he is going to try and shoot me. I don't want to be shot. If you like, I'll fight the whole lot of you, one after the other; but it ain't fair to set on me, eight to one."

The address had its effect on one man, at least, for Curley Pink nodded approvingly, and said:

"The gentleman is right, boys. He is all alone, and I'll bet ten to one he can whip any man in camp with nature's weapons and make him beg for mercy."

"Done!" cried Roaring Jack, instantly. "Take that bet in dollars next pay, Pink. It's one thing to take a little cuss like Pepper and turn him over his knee; but I'll bet he can't do nothen of the sort to me, big as he is. Pepper ain't able fur him; but I am."

And as Roaring Jack was well known as the best rough-and-tumble fighter in the county, with a frame nearly as large as that of the stranger, the rest of the cowboys shouted:

"I'll take it, too, Pink!"

All this while the stranger had been holding Pepper clutched in his iron grasp, from which the little man could not escape. As the cowboys shouted their bets, he smiled and nodded to Pink, and when the hubbub subsided a little, said aloud:

"Boys, let me say a word."

"Spit it aout," cried Roaring Jack. "You've got to the eend of your rope, young feller. You ain't got no Pepper this time."

"What I want to say is this," proceeded the stranger. "I wouldn't have done nothen if this little feller hadn't sot on me first. I don't bear no malice against him, and I'm willin' to call it square as far as he is concerned. But I ain't a

shootin' man. Up in New Hampshire there ain't a man in our parts able to stand up ag'in' me. I've taught school in my time, and pretty tough schools, too, where the boys run out every teacher afore me. If this little feller will say he won't try no more sass on me, and there's any man in this crowd wants to take up his quarrel, I'm willin' to fight that man. Kin I say more?"

The proposition seemed to meet the general approval, for Ringtail at once went to Pepper, and began to remonstrate with him.

"See hyar, Pepper, you ain't able fur that man, and he's got ye fair. Ef he wants to kill ye he kin do it, and you know it. Let up and give the rest of the boys a chance. He can't clean aout this camp alone, and you're standin' in the way of better men."

The appeal struck Pepper on a tender spot, and he was, moreover, getting sorer and sorer the longer he remained in the grasp of his merciless antagonist. With a scowl that told how the concession cost him, he said, sullenly:

"I cave in. The man's too much fur me. Some of the rest of you handle him ef ye kin."

The moment he had said that the big stranger released him, remarking:

"No boy in my school ever said I hit him arter he gave in, and my name's Sol Piper."

Then he turned to Roaring Jack, and continued:

"Now, sir, I'm ready fur you if you'll take off them pistols."

Roaring Jack instantly took off the pistols he wore, and threw them on the grass, saying:

"Nater's weepins. If I can't whip any New Hampshire man that ever stepped I'm gwine to emigrate to the No'th."

He took off his jacket at once, tightened his belt, and advanced cautiously on his big opponent, crouching in the style of an old rough-and-tumble fighter, hoping to get a waist hold, throw the other, and proceed to gouge his eyes out of his head.

Piper, on the other hand, stepped back as if he saw that he had a really formidable antagonist at last to dispose of.

He kept retreating for a few steps, and Roaring Jack smiled with contempt as he thought that the big man was getting frightened.

Then came a short rush and a struggle that lasted only a few seconds.

By the faint light of the fire the cowboys could see that the two men were locked together, but that Piper had the best of the grip.

There was a great tramping of the turf, a few grunts as both men exerted their strength to the utmost; then Roaring Jack was turned upside down and set on the top of his head on the bare earth with a crash, after which he lay still, while the victor observed, as coolly as if he had done nothing out of the way:

"Naow, gentlemen, I'm ready fur the next." The words were hardly out of his mouth before the swarthy Mexican made a dash at him, with his knife gleaming in the firelight.

Piper was almost taken unawares, for the Mexican had kept in the background till the moment of his rush; but he caught sight of the glittering blade just in time.

An angry frown crossed his brow for the first time since he had begun to fight, and he wheeled round and sprung back out of the Mexican's way, his flesh escaping the slash of the weapon, but getting his rags torn still more than they were when he entered the camp.

Then he swooped down on Miguel like a hawk on a chicken; caught his wrist with both hands, gave a wrench, and then came a wild shriek of pain from the Mexican.

CHAPTER III. THE "SOLID" MAN.

THE knife dropped from the nerveless hand of the swarthy Miguel, and he stood there, nursing a broken wrist, while the other cowboys stared at the giant that had done such wonders among them, as if he had dropped from the clouds.

As for Piper, he smiled as he looked round, with the observation:

"Waal, I thought you fellers had more grit. Up in New Hampshire, the boys used to give me a lively wrastle; but you fellers ain't no good to fight."

The taunt had its effect; for two more cowboys threw off their pistols, and rushed at him together, regardless of the compact.

Sol Piper did not seem to be discomposed by the attack; for he met them with an activity and skill in fisticuffs they had not expected from him. One blow, which no guard could resist, so straight and strong did it come, took Ringtail between the eyes and laid him out on the ground, stunned and stupid. His brother, still less fortunate, met the grip of the giant, and was tossed up in the air like a baby, caught as he was coming down, and had his face forced into the dirt, by one hand at the back of his neck, while Piper continued to hammer the face against the earth, till the yells of the cowboy subsided into silence, and it was evident that he had lost his senses.

Four of the eight men at the fire had been thus put out of the way, with an expedition that was marvelous; Pepper was not to be

counted; and there only remained Amos Whelpley and Pistol Jim, who stood beside Curley Pink.

Curley, on his part, laughed aloud, and cried to Whelpley, as the man seemed to be hesitating:

"Come, sail in, Bones. You set the boys on the stranger, and it's only fair you should take your gruel, as well as the rest."

But Amos shook his head.

"No, thankee. I ain't got nothen ag'in' the gentleman, Curley. Let Pistol Jim try him."

But Pistol Jim, who had been watching the fight with a gravity that was marvelous, said:

"I don't fight that way, and I ain't got nothen ag'in' the man, bad enough to shoot him. Let them as likes to fight that-a-way, take what they git. Stranger, you're a solid man for a Yank; and hyar's my hand on it."

The slight frown that had marked the face of the young stranger, during that fight, gave way to an expression of entire peacefulness, as he took the offered hand, and answered:

"Stranger, you're the first man in Texas, I've met, that had manners—reel—good—manners."

Then he said to Curley:

"I couldn't do less than win yer money fur ye, sir; and I hope there won't be no hard feelin's about this little muss."

Curley laughed.

"None on my part. I'm sure I've nothing to complain of. Even Pepper hasn't a word to say."

Little Pepper shook his head solemnly.

"It takes a good man to beat me," he said. "I don't wonder the other fellers had no chance."

Then, one by one, the defeated cowboys got up, from the ground, as they recovered their senses, Miguel alone staying in the background, sullenly nursing his broken wrist.

They were a sorry-looking crowd; for they had faces covered with blood, black eyes, and a general air of dilapidation that showed how they had fared.

Roaring Jack, when he stirred at last, could not rise; for he had been thrown on his head in such a way that his spine had been shocked, and all the nerves paralyzed for the time.

He had to be taken to the house and put to bed, while, as the cowboys resumed their seats by the fire, there was a universal sentiment of respect for Piper, that found its expression in the remark of Pistol Jim:

"Boys, this hyar gentleman is too good a man to let him go to any other camp. He kin whip any man in Texas, and that's my opinion."

Pepper indorsed the sentiment.

"The galoot that kin whip me, has to be a good 'un, boys. I wouldn't have give in to any other in the world, by gum! This one's a terror to wildcats."

Ringtail groaned assent.

"I don't want no more of him," he declared. "I didn't think no Yank had so much in him."

Curley, who had been the quietest and most civil of the lot, filled again the pipe which he had taken from his mouth to watch the fight, and observed dryly:

"You gentlemen will please remember that you bet against me, and that I won the bets."

There was a grunt of assent, but Dandy Joe, as he nodded gloomily, observed:

"That ain't no man. He's a giant, come outen some museum, and it ain't fair to set common men up to fight him."

Then Piper spoke, for the first time since he had finished his fight.

"Look here, gentlemen," he said; "I came to this part of the country to live in peace and quiet, and learn to be a cowboy. I didn't set on nobody here till the rest of you set on me, and I want to be friends with you. I come here out of money and everything else, and I want to get work. Can a man get a chance here to earn his living?"

There was a silence at the question, and Curley was the first to answer, with the counter-question to the stranger:

"What do you want to do, and what have you done all your life? You're too heavy to ride one of the ponies round here, and we haven't got any horse up to your weight."

Piper here interrupted him:

"I don't want to ride. I can walk as far as any of you can ride. I never saw the horse I couldn't tire out in a long day's journey. I'm a butcher by trade—that is, I've worked at that, times; and I've worked at a heap of other things, too."

"Did I understand you to say you had once taught school?" asked Curley, who was the best educated man on the ranch, and could not believe that a simple, innocent-looking man like the tramp, who had come to them in such a singular way, could be in earnest in what he had said.

Piper nodded.

"Yes, I did, up in aour parts, in the taownship of Squanville, and a fine school I had, I kin tell you, stranger. Afore I took it, the boys used to drive the teachers out, and do jestabout as they pleased with 'em, but I altered all that. It cost me two good ratans, ten cents apiece, and I wore 'em to slithers afore I got the boys

under, but I did it, and arter that they jest knowed how to behave, *I tell you*. But the old school didn't work, arter all, or I'd not be here."

"Why not?" asked Curley, who saw that he had a character to deal with.

Piper burst out laughing at the recollection.

"Waal, the school war all right, and the boys was all right, and I was all right; but the trustees warn't all right. Ye see, the trouble was, I allers sot a good stress on *manners*, as my ole lady told me. Says she to me, says she, many and many a time, 'My ooy, whatever you do, wherever ye are, don't never furgit your manners, and don't let no one else furgit theirs.' I tell you, gentlemen, when a man's mother tells him that, time and time again, he ain't apt to furgit it. I'd got the boys in the school into sich good trim that they allersaid 'Good-mornin', Mr. Piper,' when I came in, and they'd b'en taught the same, when any of the trustees come, too. Waal, one day ole Deacon Briggsby come to see us. He was an awful rough-talking feller, and the boys knowed it, so they was watching for him. I allers made it a rule that ef any boy could find me out in bad manners he oughter tell me right aout abaout it, so long as he did it in a civil way, and I allers apologized when I'd b'en in fault. Gentlemen, it ain't allers so easy to apologize fur what ye've did, when ye're in the wrong; but I taught my boys to do it, and I sot 'em a good example. And, that morning, the deacon he was mighty grumpy, and I reckon he'd had the rhoomatiz bad, and it made him so he couldn't take what come; and while he was on the platform and my back was turned, he got a spit-ball right in the eye from one of the boys. The boy that did it knowed what he was abaout, and the old deacon never knowed who throwed it, but he up and ripped aout a reg'lar oath—on the platform, gentlemen, mind that, naow! And the boys they hollered:

"Bad manners, bad manners! 'pologize! 'pologize!"

"And he got as red as a turkey-gobbler, and there was a reg'lar ruction."

"And what was the end of it?" asked Curley.

"The end of it was the deacon told me I hadn't oughter be allowed to teach school at all, fur I couldn't keep the boys in order; and then I told him that my boys knowed better'n he did, 'cause they never heard no swearing nor bad manners round my school, and ef he thought he could handle the boys better'n I could, I'd leave him in the school-house fur jest one hour; and he might try."

"And did he stay?" asked Pistol Jim.

Sol broke out into a renewed laugh at the recollection.

"Stay! He jest tried it on fur ten minutes and then come aout of that school a-kitin', the boys all arter him, and I had to go in and resky him. Warn't he mad, though? They sent spit-balls arter him, and stuck pins in his chair, and when his back was turned they writ with chalk on it, and then the biggest boy wanted to fight him, and the hull of 'em sot on him and run him aout, jest as they had every teacher they had afore that time."

"But what was the end of it all?" asked Curley, seeing that he had stopped.

The young man gave a quizzical smile as he replied:

"Gentlemen, the end of the matter was that the trustees said that the school had better be broke up."

"But why?" asked Pepper, curiously.

Piper laughed again.

"Waal, ye see, they said that the joys couldn't be managed without me; and it warn't the thing fur a hull board of trustees to let the boys git the best of them. So they concluded to shut up the school, till such time as the boys' dads would make 'em behave, with any sort of teacher; and that's the way I come to give up school. I never took much to it, that's a fact; but it was fun, while the boys fit me hard. Some of 'em was nigh as big as me, and a heap of 'em older; but I was the boss, as they found out."

"And how old are you, then?" asked Curley.

"I'm twenty-one, come next fifteenth of May, and when I left school, I c'u'd teach readin' and writin' and spellin', as well as any man in Squanville township. I never took much stock in the languages; but I kin cipher in fractions, as well as the next man."

"And what did you do, after you left the school?"

"I went to butcherin'. I've done a heap of things in my life, gentlemen; and, afore I get through, I hope to do a heap more. D'ye think there's any chance for a man, in butcherin', in this part of the country?"

"I think so; but you will have to see the head man of the ranch," said Curley. "We are only herders here, you know, and have no power to employ new hands. We would like to have you with us, for you seem to be a jolly fellow enough."

"That's what I am, gentlemen. Gentle as a kitten, as long as no one shows bad manners; but when it's a question of manners, ye know, I'm there every time."

"I should think so," remarked Pistol Jim, in a solemn and reflective way. "The fact is—Ah, what did you say your name was?"

"Piper, sir, Solomon Piper, of Squanville, New Hampshire."

"Well, we'll have to call you Sol, for short. In Texas every man has his name, you know, and your name shall be—Let me see."

Pistol Jim appeared to be pondering over the best name to give the new-comer, and the rest of the boys watched him eagerly; for Jim had a genius for names, and they generally stuck.

"Look hyar, gentlemen," he said at last, "this man has come in and laid out every man in the camp, slicker'n greased lightnin'. I propose we call him Solid Sol, and make him one of our boys, arter this. It's allers well to have a solid man on our side."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RANCHERO.

FROM that moment the stranger was apparently an accepted member of the community of the Mesquite Ranch, and the offers of accommodation for the night, in his favor, were numerous and pressing.

The climate of Texas is warm, and the sleeping arrangements of the simplest, consisting of a saddle-blanket or two, with a saddle for a pillow and the sky for a bedroom ceiling; while, in place of a mattress, a soft spot on the ground offers all the luxury, for which a genuine cowboy sighs, when he visits a hotel in the East.

The method of sleeping in vogue on the Mesquite Ranch had the further advantage that it encouraged the habit of early rising, so conducive to health and wealth.

Therefore, when the morning sun dawned on the ranch, its first rays found all the cowboys on the alert, ready to drive the cattle to water and prevent the straying of any strange animals from the neighboring Rattlesnake Ranch, into the territory sacred to their own herds.

With the rest, got up the young Hercules who had created such a sensation at the ranch, the night before. Now that the full light of day was on him, he looked a tramp from top to toe; for his clothes were the merest collection of rags, and, practically, he was barefooted.

Nevertheless, he seemed to be quite cheerful in his mind; for he was singing "Yankee Doodle," at the top of his voice, when Curley approached him, and said in an undertone:

"Sol, if I were you, I wouldn't sing that, here."

"And why not?" asked Sol, curiously, as he wheeled round to stare at Curley.

The other looked a little embarrassed.

They were at some distance from the rest; for the cowboys had taken their ponies and were scattering to their duties, while the cook was getting breakfast ready.

"I'll tell you why," answered Curley, in a constrained sort of way. "The boys don't like the song."

"And why not?" asked Sol, again.

The young man flushed slightly.

"Well, the fact is that we in Texas don't like Yankees much; and if you want to stay friends with them, the less you say about Yankees the better."

The New Hampshire youth seemed to be a little puzzled at the explanation, and did not answer for some moments.

At last he said:

"Seems to me I thought the war was over, and we was all friends again."

Curley nodded.

"Yes, that is true; but for all that, we don't like the song of Yankee Doodle, and if you are wise, you won't sing it. The owner of the ranch is expected here, this morning, and, if you want a place, the less you say about being a Yankee, the better chance will you have."

Sol whistled softly to himself as he surveyed the scene round him; but he made no further answer to what Curley had said. The young man meant well, for he had taken a fancy to the queer, independent fellow from New Hampshire, and he had seen the lowering looks that greeted the strains of the familiar air, as Sol sung it, in his high tenor voice.

Miguel Romero, in especial, was glowering at the man who had broken his wrist, the night before, and Curley knew that the Mexican was not the man to let a grudge go long unsettled, if he could get a chance to stab another, unawares.

But any further conversation was stopped by the tin horn of the cook, as he announced that breakfast was ready, and set the long table of rough boards, that stood on trestles, in front of the ranch-house.

The cowboys who had been out, heard the horn, and came galloping in; a place being reserved for Sol, at which he did ample justice to what was set before him.

In the midst of the meal, Bones, who was looking out over the prairie, said:

"Thar comes the cunnel, boys. Naow, school-master, ef you want a place as butcher, naow's your time."

Sol, looking up, descried a horseman coming over the level plain, the rays of the morning

sun gleaming on his dress, which seemed to glitter, as if it was covered with gold.

Even at the distance at which the strange horseman was, he could see that he wore the most gorgeous of apparel.

"Is that the boss?" he asked.

Curley nodded.

"That is Colonel Bigbee, who owns the ranch, and the big slaughter-house. He is coming to take some cattle away, I guess, and you're in good time, if you want a job of butcherin'."

The young Hercules immediately arose from his place, and began to smooth out his rusty and wrinkled garments, but the task was useless, and he observed in a mournful manner:

"Tain't no use, boys. These things was fresh, when they come from Squanville; but the darned freight-keers takes the shine out of cloze, do what ye will to save 'em."

The strange horseman rode up to the table, and called out:

"Morning, boys. Want a score of good beasts, and another butcher to-day. Thar's a contract come in, and it's got to be done in a hurry."

Curley was the man who answered him, for he was the overseer of the place.

"The cattle are all in good order, colonel," he said, "and we've got a regular butcher from the North, came in last night, who is looking for a place. He might suit you."

Then Sol had an opportunity to inspect the owner of the ranch more closely than before. A typical Southerner in face and figure, he was tall and lean; had a long face, grave in expression; keen gray eyes, tawny hair, and wore a chin beard, with its companion mustache, grown long, giving an air of great dignity to the face. The colonel was dressed in all the finery of a Texan grandee, with a fifty-dollar hat on his head, very broad in the brim, girt with a gold cord, fashioned in the shape of a snake; the eyes of the animal being formed of jewels, that glittered in the sunshine.

His jacket was of green velveteen, as were his open trowsers, buttoned down the sides with gold pieces, of ten dollars each, a hole having been bored in the coin for the purpose.

He wore riding-boots of yellow leather, with enormous spurs, either of gold or heavily gilt, while, in the scarlet silk sash at his waist, lay a pair of revolvers, with ivory butts and plated barrels.

He rode in a saddle of the Mexican pattern, incrustated with silver plates to such an extent that the original tree was hidden, and his bridle bit was of silver, while the reins were of silver chains.

Altogether, this strange horseman looked more like a figure stepped from the stage than a man of business, and Sol stared at him, open-mouthed, as the colonel turned on him and scanned him from head to foot.

"Is this your man, Curley?" he asked.

"Yes, colonel."

The ranchero favored Sol with a still more searching glance.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

Sol remembered Curley's advice, and answered:

"From the railroad, when they dumped me. I allers heerd a great deal of what a fine place Texas was, and I wanted to see fur myself what 'twas like. So I come from Nashville, the best way I knowed haow, sometimes on the top of the keers, when the men was good-natured; and more often on the bottom, where the dust was enough to choke a feller. I made a straight ride all the way from Dallas to here, and I want a job at butcherin', ef I kin git it, boss."

Bigbee listened to him till he had finished, and then said, doubtfully:

"Do you think you understand our Texas long-horns? They are pretty hard to handle. Did you ever throw a steer?"

Sol burst out laughing in the face of the other, as he cried:

"Throw a steer! Why, man, I'm the only boy in our parts that ever *did* throw a steer, fair and square. I'll bet ye—no, I won't bet, 'cause I ain't got the money, and 'tain't manners to bet if ye ain't got the stamps in yer pocket—but I can beat any man in this camp at throwing a steer, and I don't bar none."

The ranchero raised his eyebrows.

"I reckon you talk too much," was all the reply he made, to which Sol retorted:

"I'm willin' to try ag'in' any man ye've got, and show ye if I'm talkin' too much."

The colonel turned to Miguel Romero.

"Here, Miguel, rope me one of those steers out yonder, and let's see if this handy fellow can do as well."

Miguel hesitated, and the colonel noticed that his arm was in a sling.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked. "Got hurt? Well, never mind, *you*. Curley, tell one of the boys to rope a steer, and let's see if this man knows what we're talking about."

"You go, Ringtail," ordered Curley, and with that Ringtail jumped on his pony and galloped off to the nearest herd, from which he selected a fine young steer, and drove it toward the fire, swinging his lariat as he came like a whip.

Sol watched the proceeding with ill-disguised

contempt, and when the steer, which was young and wild, came tearing toward the fire, he said:

"Is that the way you throw steers, with a hoss and rope? Any fool kin do that if he kin ride. What I mean is that I kin walk up to that creetur and throw him, and that there ain't another man in your camp kin do it. I don't want no ropes to throw my steers, though they're handy to tie 'em afterward if they kick."

Bigbee laughed outright.

"You're an amusing blower. Why, do you mean to say you can walk up to a steer and throw him without roping him first? Come, let's see you do it, and I'll give you a place. That's fair; isn't it?"

"Fair enough," returned the young giant, his face lighting up at the words.

Then he stalked straight toward the steer, which by this time had got into considerable of a temper, and was pawing the earth and eying the men on foot round the fire, as if he was meditating a charge on them.

As soon as Sol stepped out in front of the rest, however, the attention of the animal became riveted on the new-comer, and he neglected the rest.

The Hercules walked straight to the steer till he was within a few yards, when the animal lowered its head and came tearing at him, with a low bellow, tossing its horns as it came.

Ringtail, who was swinging his rope ready to throw, was admonished by a shout from his boss not to interfere with the fun, and Sol was left alone to do as he could, bare-handed, with the angry steer.

The cowboys expected fun, for they knew the activity and pluck of the regular long-horned Texan steer, and this particular animal was a well-known one for its quickness.

CHAPTER V.

COWS AND COWBOYS.

BUT Sol did not seem to be at all alarmed, as the steer came driving at him. He waited for its coming, till it was within a few feet, when he skipped to one side, with an agility that no one would have expected from his huge frame.

"Well done, Jumbo!" said the colonel, half to himself, as he witnessed the evolution. "But, if I don't mistake, you're not out of the woods yet."

This was a fact, for the steer did not seem to be bothered by the skip of the man. Round it came, very nearly grazing the body of the strange Yankee, and following him up, in a way that would have terrified an old bull-fighter.

Sol kept skipping round, not seeming in the least frightened, for they could hear him calling as he went:

"Naow, then, stoopid, where are ye goin' to? Did ye think ye had me, that time—did ye, indeed? Now, let's see what ye're made of! Now then, what d'ye say to that?"

And they saw him dodge the steer round and round, all the time in danger from the long spreading horns, while the animal was getting more savage every minute, till at last the ranchero, in the careless style of a man who sets no value whatever on life, called out jeeringly:

"Why don't you throw the steer? One of my boys would have had it done, long ago."

Sol heard, and, in the moment that the words were uttered, he suddenly changed his tactics, and dashed in, close to the steer's neck.

In another moment he had grasped the long horns, getting behind them, so as to be out of danger of a sudden thrust; threw one leg over the nearest horn, and cast his whole weight on it, so as to bring the steer's head to one side and downward.

His weight was so great that it effected this; and the animal had to exert itself to the utmost to lift him up, while it could not maintain the weight in the air, and was compelled to lower its head again and again.

The spectacle of the giant riding on the horn of the steer, thrown hither and thither, but all the while tiring out the animal more and more, was one new to the cowboys, who were used to roping, with two horsemen, but had never seen a single man conquer a beast in such a way before.

"Why don't you throw him?" cried Bigbee, who had no idea that the thing could be done, and had a wicked delight in putting the big stranger in danger, to see the way he fought.

Sol heard the cry, and shouted back:

"I'm doing it as fast as I kin. Ef you think you kin do better, come and take a holt."

With that, he gave a heave of his body to one side, at the very end of the horn, and brought the steer's head almost to the ground.

Then, while they were looking to see what he would do next, he slipped off; got in front of the animal; turned its head still more to one side, with the muzzle almost upward, and gave a kick to the foreleg, on which all its weight was resting.

In a moment the steer fell over on its side, and Sol called out:

"Naow, then, ef ye'll lend me a rope, I'll tie the beast fur ye."

The ranchero was astonished at the strength

displayed by the stranger, and it was in a tone of more respect than he had yet manifested that he said to Ringtail:

"Give him your rope. That's the first time I ever saw that trick played. That man is Goliath, Samson and Hercules, all in one."

"Oh, he's solid, you bet!" muttered Curley. Colonel Bigbee did not laugh when he saw the steer on its side, with its legs secured by a turn of the lariat which Ringtail had thrown to the Yankee, and which the latter had cast round the animal, in a way that showed he had done the thing before.

On the contrary, he rode up to Sol, and said to him, in a manner that showed kindness:

"You are a handy chap to have around, and I'll give you a place. You say you have been a butcher? Where did you serve your time?"

Sol looked up at his interrogator doubtfully, before he answered.

"Waal, boss, to tell the truth, 'twas in the old Granite State of New Hampshire; but ef you folks down here don't like it, I kin make it any other State, jest as well as that."

Bigbee smiled.

"You're a Yankee, I suppose. Well, that needn't hurt you here. We don't like Yankees, as a rule; but if they behave themselves, I don't know that we drive them out, every time. How have you got on with the boys?"

Sol grinned.

"As well as a man could wish, boss. We had the liveliest kinder time, last night, when I fu'st come in, but we'll git on now. All I wants is good manners; and ef men gives me that, I'll give 'em as good as they sends."

Bigbee looked curiously round at his men, and when he marked the black eyes and swelled faces of a majority of the cowboys, he burst out laughing, as he said:

"So you've been at it, already? Well, did you find that our boys could fight?"

Sol shrugged his shoulders.

"Waal, as to that, I ain't prepared to say, boss. They ain't up to the fun our boys in New Hampshire is; but they'll git used to it, arter a while. We'll git along, I guess."

"If you'll take my advice," observed the ranchero, more gravely, "you'll try to get on peaceably. The boys here are used to fighting in a different way from what you do, up North. You use your fists, and our boys use pistols; but they don't back down any way, as you have found, I doubt not. Can you ride?"

"Never was on a hoss in my life, boss, 'cept to take the plow-hosses to water, but I ons't or twis't rode a bullock. Hosses ain't apt to like my weight, when I git on 'em."

"I should think not," said the ranchero, dryly. "Well, get some sort of a beast, and come on with me, when I go to the slaughter-house, or, if you like it better, you can help to drive. I've got to take in a score of bullocks, and have them all in beef by sunset. Can you work quick?"

Sol stretched out his arms.

"Waal, I reckon ye won't find many works faster, boss. But I hain't got no tools. I've not b'en butcherin', lately, sence I took the road fur Texas, and I might be out of practice at fu'st."

"Well, you shall have the tools to work with, and I'll put you against the best man I've got, to cut up."

The Granite State boy laughed.

"That's my best holt, boss. There's them as kin beat me at skinnin' and cleanin' karkidges, but when it comes to cuttin' up, quick, I kin give odds to any boy I know of. That's where the muscle comes in."

Bigbee frowned slightly as he remarked:

"Well, you won't suffer for want of a trum-peter, that's a sure thing, young man."

Then he turned away, and began to give orders to his men, as the result of which, a herd of some twenty or thirty steers were selected from the mass of cattle on the big ranch, and Sol found himself, not long after, on his way to the slaughter-house of the ranch, accompanied by two men on horseback, charged with the care of a herd of wild Texan long-horns, which seemed to be animated by one desire, namely to get back to the ranch which they were being compelled to leave as fast as they could.

Ringtail and his brother Ike were detailed as the mounted herders, and Sol was given a big whip, which he was told to use as he best knew how, when the herd started.

The object of the Texans seemed to be to give the stranger, who had worsted their best men, the night before, the hardest of tasks; and they expected that the herd, accustomed as it was to be driven exclusively by mounted men, would make things hot for the Yankee, who trudged in solitary blessedness, on foot, at the rear of the bunch of cattle.

Such a small herd, with two drivers, ought to have been easy to handle, but the men who went with Sol had evidently determined to leave him to himself, and see if he could take care of the charge he had assumed.

They rode lazily along, and when a bullock got out of the herd and charged back, as it did at intervals of about two minutes, instead of doing their ordinary duty and driving it on, they would turn in their saddles, and shout:

"Helloa, Yank, drive that critter back!"

Sol would start to head it off, and run like a deer with his long legs, always getting in front of the animal before it could pass him where he lagged in the rear of the herd.

The steer, as a rule, charged him straight, but every time he met it fairly, and dealt it a cut with the whip, which turned it back, the blood streaming down its face.

Then the two cowboys would snicker to each other, as if they enjoyed seeing the fun, and go on again, till another animal broke loose, when the same game would be repeated.

Colonel Bigbee did not go with them from the ranch, for he stayed behind to talk with Curley, who was overseer of the place.

He came galloping up about half an hour after the herders had left the ranch, and saw that the bunch was going on as quietly as if it had been made up of fat Devons, or some other tame, high-bred cattle.

As he neared it, however, another animal broke loose, and he saw that the mounted men did not offer to intercept it, but let Sol, on foot, do all the running.

The colonel looked on with some interest, for he had never seen the time when a Texas long-horn would not get the best of a man on foot. When he saw the way in which Sol's long legs cleared the ground and the tremendous cut with which the giant turned back the beast, he nodded approvingly, and when the herd was again going quietly, he rode up to say to Ringtail:

"You two men weren't hired to ride for pleasure; but to drive cattle. That man has done enough. The next beast that breaks out you go after it."

The next beast broke out almost as he was speaking, and Ringtail galloped after it, and sent it back to the herd before it had gone fifty feet.

Sol watched the proceeding with much interest, and when it was over he ran up beside the horses, and observed to the ranchero:

"Say, boss, ef it's all the same to you, those fellers have b'en playin' off on me."

"How?" asked Bigbee, affecting not to understand what he meant.

Sol's face was red, and the sweat was pouring down, as he answered the ranchero with some heat:

"They've b'en lettin' me do all the runnin' arter the pesky brutes, when they might have done it jest as well themselves."

Bigbee laughed.

"That's your own fault. As long as you are good-natured enough to do their work for them they will impose on you. You are only a tenderfoot yet, you know."

"A tenderfoot!" echoed Sol, in high dudgeon. "I'd have you to know, mister, that my foot's a blamed sight harder nor any man that ever was a-straddle of a pony all his day's work. I'm civil, and I ain't on the fight, as any man that knows me knows; but I call that bad manners, and bad manners is a thing that my ole mother told me to allow from no one when I wouldn't show it myself. I'm a-goin' to take that out of both of those fellers afore I've done with 'em."

And his blue eyes flamed in such an ominous manner that Ringtail hastened to say, with the memory of the previous night's whipping:

"Lord, Yank, we didn't mean to be oncivil. It were only a joke, ye know, and a man that can't take a joke ain't no man at all."

Sol shook his head ominously.

"That's all very nice; but you fellers has b'en playin' it off on me 'cause I ain't used to the ways of the country, and I'll git square with ye for what ye've done yet. You see if I don't."

Bigbee reined up his horse, and faced Sol, to speak sternly:

"Whatever else you do, my Yankee friend, I want you to remember one thing, that I don't allow any fighting on my place among my men. If you fight you'll have to find another place."

The Hercules compressed his lips.

"That's all right, boss. I ain't no fighting man; but I don't want nobody to put on me. I won't fight 'em, but I'll git square with 'em for all that, and you'll say so when ye see it."

The ranchero looked at him for a moment, as if he was inclined to press the matter further, and his hand was trembling over the butt of his pistol, his invariable panacea for all sorts of disobedience; but Sol had already resumed his path, as if he had no idea that he was doing anything to offend his new employer, and Bigbee said no more, but continued on his way to the great slaughter-house, where he made beef by the car-load.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

THE slaughter-house of the Mesquite Ranch was a very primitive concern, where the sky did duty for a roof; and the only buildings were the great canning-shed, where the beef was made into a shape fit for shipping to market after a slovenly fashion that has long since disappeared. The Bigbee canning-house was one of the first establishments of the kind in the State, after the war, and the demand was for shipment to England and other countries, where meat was high and scarce.

The slaughtering was done in the open air,

and a cloud of vultures was always hovering over the place, waiting for the time when the men shifted ground to get out of the way of the offal.

The Hercules had to work hard, as Bigbee had told him at first, and he fulfilled his boast when he came to cut up, by the way in which he would divide a carcass with a single sweep of the knife, and by the skill with which he dis-jointed the limbs.

Most of the men round him were Mexicans, swarthy fellows, with evil eyes and saturnine faces, who looked at him with sullen, suspicious looks, as if they did not like the intrusion of a stranger into their domain. They threw every obstacle in his way that they could, but Sol was getting used to Texan jealousies.

Colonel Bigbee was near him most of the time, watching the work and hurrying up matters; for, as he said, he had a heavy contract on hand, and was driving it through as fast as he could, in a style compounded of Northern and Western methods of driving.

Sol had little opportunity of looking round him till the sun began to slope toward the horizon and the bell rung to stop.

Then he straightened up from his work and took a look round him to see what sort of place he was in.

He saw a big shed with a tall brick chimney in the middle belching smoke still from the canning-works, the bones of the cattle being used with part of the offal for fuel, making a thick and offensive smoke.

All round the shed and stock-yard lay the prairie with a slow winding stream running lazily near by. The glistening lines of a railroad track were close to the back of the shed, and several cars were run in on a switch; a few black men were at work loading them with cans from the shed.

Sol had heard nothing of any locomotive all day, and had come to the conclusion that the railroad must be a lazy sort of a concern at best, in which he was not far wrong.

Far away in the distance, dark dots told the presence of the herds on the ranch, and he could distinguish several cowboys going their rounds. But, apart from the shed, he saw no evidence of human habitation, and was wondering where the men at the works lived, when one of the Mexicans said to him in broken English, with a smile as polite as he could make it, in spite of his sinister face:

"Vere you come from, *camarado*?"

It was the first civility that the young stranger had met with in Texas, and his face lighted up as he replied:

"Thankee kindly, sir. I come here to live peaceably in Texas, ef I kin. Might I ax ye where all the boys live?"

The Mexican seemed to be puzzled.

"V'ere ve lif? *No intendo*" (Don't understand.)

"I don't *intend* nothen wrong, mister. But where is a man to sleep?"

The Mexican showed his teeth in a smile.

"Ah, v'ere sleep? Yaas. I show you. You 'ave *serape*?"

"*Srappy*? What the dickens is that?"

"See, I show you."

His new friend took him a little to one side where, in the shade of the shed, were what he took for a bundle of old clothes. The Mexican showed him that they were the blankets and *serapes*—a garment between a shawl and a cloak—of the men at work at the slaughter-house.

"Ve sleep—*aquí*—you say 'ere, on de ground, all de 'ot veddair. Dat is good. Ve no get sick in 'ot room. Aha! You play *monté*?"

The abrupt way in which he concluded showed the real reason of his politeness, for he was looking out for a new man in the gambling circle that he and his comrades of the works had formed among themselves.

Sol shook his head vaguely, and was saved from further conversation by Colonel Bigbee, who came toward him calling out:

"Halloa, you new man, what's your name? Sol, come here."

Sol went up to his new employer, and the colonel eyed him from head to foot.

If he had looked ragged and forlorn before, he was positively repulsive now, for his rags were deeply stained with blood, and he looked about as unfit a specimen for ladies' company as one could pick up in a long day's journey.

Nevertheless the colonel said:

"Sol, I want you to come up to the house."

Sol stared round him. The colonel had said "the house," but not a symptom of a house could he see.

Bigbee noticed his glance, and smiled.

"Don't see the house, do you? Never mind. There is a house not far off, but you can't see it from here. You look like a tramp, and I don't want such a looking fellow about the place when visitors come. Come along with me."

He turned and rode away, and Sol followed him, wondering what sort of a place Texas would turn out to be in the end. So far, he had been alternately liking and disliking it.

The colonel put his mustang—for he rode the same sort of pony as all the men on the ranch—to a canter, and Sol trotted after him, keeping up with a speed that astonished the ranchero,

who, after he had ridden for nearly a mile away from the shed, looked round and saw the young giant at his heels.

"Why, you can run a streak, can't you?" he said.

Sol grinned, but did not open his mouth, for he realized that he had no breath to waste.

"We shall be over the swell and in sight of the house in a moment," continued the ranchero, as he cantered along. "I don't like to live near the slaughter-house, and I keep the ladies away from that part of the ranch as much as possible. When you get there I will show you the kitchen, and you can go to the steward and tell him to fit you out with a new suit of clothes. Then get yourself into shape, and get supper in the kitchen. I'll send for you when I want you."

Then he gave the rein to his pony and galloped on faster than before, as if he wished to test the speed of the young giant to the utmost.

But Sol had measured the pony well, and ran at its heels, so that, to get away from him, Bigbee was compelled to put in the spurs and let the animal out to its best flight of speed, when, of course, the man fell back. In this manner they ascended a gentle swell, imperceptible till they got to the top, when the Hercules saw before him a scene, so great a contrast to what he had hitherto conceived of Texas, that he uttered an involuntary cry of admiration.

Before him lay a garden in the prairie. The river took a bend at this point, and ran close to a house, built of logs, to be sure, but such a log-house as Sol had never dreamed of before.

It rose to two stories, and had any quantity of gables and oriel windows, the whole thatched with golden yellow straw, and surrounded with a garden of flowers, of the most varied hues.

The house was of large size, and the outbuildings stretched round it for a considerable distance. That the place had a number of inhabitants was plain from the evidences of care everywhere displayed.

Black men were at work in the garden, and by the stable doors, where some of them were cleaning horses, and Sol's quick eye detected the fact that some of the horses were thoroughbreds.

A broad veranda ran across the front of the house, and on this Sol could see the flutter of white dresses, from which he knew that ladies were there.

The blood flew to his face as he looked down at his rags, and reflected that he must pass in sight of the veranda; but his new employer had reined up at the top of the swell, and waited for him to come up, when he asked, with a smile:

"Well, Sol, how do you like Mesquite Ranch, for a place to live?"

The New Hampshire man grinned his delight, for he could not yet speak between want of breath and words to express his admiration.

"It's a blamed elegant place," he said, as he found the first, "and a man might live all his days without finding a better one, boss."

The ranchero seemed to be pleased with the artless praise, for he said:

"Sol, you're right. A finer place is not to be found in the State, though that is not saying much. You see the stables yonder. Go back by the rear of the house. I don't want the ladies to see you till you are presentable. Go by the stables, and ask for Zip. He's the head there. He will tell you where to find Mr. Atkinson, my steward, who will supply you with a suit of clothes. I will send for you when I want you."

Then he galloped off, leaving Sol alone, to enter the place that looked to him, after the desolate prairies, like a glimpse of fairy land.

He obeyed the injunction of the master of the place, as to keeping out of sight, and went round by the back way, till he neared the stables, when he was greeted by the barks of about fifty hounds of all sizes and ages, coming out to meet him, open-mouthed.

Sol had acquired a great respect for dogs, in his career as a tramp from New Hampshire; but, when he expected that he would be attacked by them, he was agreeably surprised to find that they ceased their barking as they got nearer, and actually seemed to be quite friendly, the more so that he did not exhibit any fear, though he felt decidedly uncomfortable as they snuffed round his legs.

Whether it was the scent of the slaughter-house or not, the hounds seemed to be quite well-disposed toward him, and accompanied him to the back of the stables.

Passing round these, he came in sight of the black grooms, hard at work at the horses, and was surprised at the fine appearance of the animals that they were grooming.

One old white-headed man seemed to be superintending the work, and to him Sol addressed himself, asking:

"Is your name Zip?"

The old negro drew himself up to reply:

"White man, my name am Mr. Zippanyer Bigbee. *Dat* my name, and no white trash don't wanten call me out of it, nudder. What you want hyar?"

Sol saw that he was a consequential sort of personage, and replied at once:

"Excuse me, mister; but the boss—Cunnel Bigbee—told me to find Zip—"

"*Dat's* different," the old man interrupted.

"Marse Bigbee he call me Zip, 'cause me and him knowed each oder, eber so long. What he tell you tell me? You hyar me?"

"He told me that you would show me the way to Mr. Atkinson, the overseer, and that—"

"Then why you no say dat at once, and not come raound me wid dem fool questions?" the old negro demanded, testily. "You come 'long wid me and I show you Marse Atkinson. He no 'count Yankee, anyhaow."

So saying, and grumbling to himself all the way, old Zip led the shabby stranger round the back of the house, to an outbuilding, where he knocked on the door, and entering, introduced Sol to a thin, dried-up gentleman, with a yellow face, to whom he said with scant courtesy:

"Dis 'ere man says Marse Bigbee tole him to come hyar to see you."

The yellow-faced man looked up at Sol in a sour way, as if he did not like the looks of him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STEWARD.

MR. ATKINSON stared at Sol from head to foot, and said, after the survey:

"This is no place for tramps. What do you want, anyhaow?"

Sol looked him in the eye, and realized from certain peculiarities, that the man was from the same place as himself. He even recognized the name, for he had often heard of one Jim Atkinson, who had gone away from New Hampshire, long before the war, and was said to have become an overseer, down South, somewhere. Atkinson saw the scrutinizing look, and demanded still more rudely:

"Well, what do you want? Can't you speak?"

Sol took a step toward him, and looked down at him from his six feet of brawn, remarking placidly:

"The fu'st thing I want is *manners*. My ole mother allers tole me to mind my manners, and not to let no one else have bad manners, anywhere raound me."

The overseer or steward grew a sort of orange color, produced by the rush of blood to a face naturally as yellow as a gold-piece.

Down to his hip went his hand, with the Texan instinct of finding a pistol; but, before he could draw it, Sol's hand was on his, as he said, politely:

"That's bad manners, sir; and I ain't the man to allow it. Put that thing away. It might go off and hurt you."

Atkinson glared up at him, but the grip that was on his wrist was so powerful, and the frame of the man before him so ominous of reserve strength, that he finally cooled down and asked:

"Well, then, what do you want? Who sent you hyar?"

Sol smiled benignly.

"Your boss sent me here, sir; Cunnel Bigbee. He tole me to find you, and tell you to give me a nice suit of clothes, to be paid for out of my wages, of course, for we New Hampshire men don't take charity, as you ought to know, bein' a New Hampshire man yourself."

Atkinson shifted uneasily in his chair.

"How do you know where I come from?" he demanded, sullenly. "Of course, if the colonel says that you are to be fitted out, you shall have the clothes. Are you to be a herder?"

"I don't know as to that," returned Sol, with a shrug. "The colonel tole me to get the clothes, for he wanted to show me to the ladies. I s'pose he wants me to look the prettiest I kin, so, the better the cloze you trots out, mister, the better I shall like it."

The steward sneered openly.

"Take you to see the ladies, indeed! I suppose you think you can make me swallow that."

"I don't keer what ye *swally*, or what ye don't *swally*," returned Sol, rather sharply; but this I know, that ef the cunnel sends fur me, and you ain't got me rigged up proper, it won't be my fault, and I shall tell him as much."

The threat seemed to have its effect on the overseer, for he instantly rose from his seat, looking rather scared, and said hastily:

"No offense, I'm sure; but this is the strangest thing. I never heard of the colonel doing so strange a thing before."

And with that, muttering to himself, he took Sol to another house not far from the first, and showed him a large room full of clothing on shelves, saying:

"Take your choice. The hands get their suits hyar, and they're all good stuff, 'most as good as we used to have afore the war. You can wash in the horse-trough."

"Thankee," said the Hercules, cheerfully. "I'll do it, and when I git rigged I'll show you that I ain't as rough as I look."

He went to the shelves and found an assortment of clothing such as he had never seen before, for Bigbee kept up the sort of state that had been the rule in large Southern plantations before the war, and clothed his hands in goods that he bought in bulk from the North.

Sol looked at the heaps of apparel with an honest pleasure in his simple face, that showed how he felt the contrast with his own attire.

The overseer had turned his back, and he was free to select what he wanted. Right in front of him, among the rest of the clothes, he noticed

a suit of velveteen that struck him as resembling that which he had seen on the ranchero himself, and with an instinct of vanity that showed how his rags must have vexed him before, the young Hercules took up this very suit, and marched out to the horse-trough to wash before putting it on.

Atkinson turned round, saw him with it in his hands, and instantly rushed at him, as if he were shocked at the assurance of the proceeding.

"Here, Yank, those are not for you," he cried. "I hain't got orders to give you a hundred-dollar suit. It would take a year's wages to pay for those things. Take these."

But Sol had hold of the garments he had chosen; while those to which the steward pointed were of a dirty brown color, to which he objected as too much like the rags he was about to doff, as he hoped, forever.

"The cunnel told me I was to choose what I wanted," he said, "and I've chosen these, mister. 'It'll be bad manners to refuse me, naow I've got 'em, besides which I ain't goin' to giv' 'em up; so make the most of that.'"

And Sol marched off to the horse-trough, the steward hesitating what to do, and in the mean time yielding.

It was the work of a very short time for the tramp to throw off his old rags, assume the new ones, and wash his hands and face, after which he produced from the recesses of the ancient and abandoned garments a comb, with which he made his long hair straight and tidy.

When he had finished his toilet, he said to Atkinson:

"Naow, squire, I'll take a hat. None of yer common things, but a good one, and a pair of boots—the best ye've got. If the cunnel wants me to look fine as a fiddle I'm a-goin' to do it."

Atkinson, since he had changed his attire, saw something in the stranger that compelled his respect. Sol was no longer the ragged vagabond who might be snubbed and ordered about. He had assumed the dress of a Texan dandy of the first water, and the clothes became him in a manner that the steward had not thought possible.

He motioned Sol to choose foot and head-wear, and the man from the White Mountains selected the best to be found in the warehouse, after which he said to Atkinson, who was watching him silently:

"Naow, if the boss wants to see me I'm ready."

Atkinson sneered openly.

"When he wants to see you! Ay, that's the question. When? I reckon he won't want to see you more than once, and then he'll send you back to take a suit of clothes better adapted to the work we give such fellows as you."

"And what sort of work is that?" asked Sol.

The steward curled his lip.

"We don't employ many Yanks hyar," he said with an exaggerated accent, which did not deceive Sol, who retorted:

"Then what air you doin' here?"

Atkinson colored slightly.

"That's none of your business. I'm as good a Texan as any man hyar. You keep a still tongue if you ain't anxious to make acquaintance with tar on a brush and a few feathers to keep it from coming off."

Sol allowed a smile to cross his face.

"Is that the way you treat New Hampshire men daown here? I swan, if I'd knowed that, I might have stayed in Squanville, where they used to call you Jimmy Atkinson. You seem to have furgot the old place, Jimmy. The boys hain't furgot you, though."

Atkinson turned away his head to conceal the bitter scowl that marked it, for he was afraid of the young giant; but further dispute was prevented by the appearance of a black servant, who came up to Atkinson and took off his hat, as respectfully as before a king, saying:

"Please, Marse Atkinson, de marster wants to see de new man he sent raound hyar, he says."

Atkinson nodded his head toward Sol.

"There he is. Tell him yourself, you black rascal. I don't want anything to do with Yanks."

The negro—he was a young, innocent-looking fellow—saw that something had occurred to make the steward angry, and he looked embarrassed, twisting his hat in his hands, and not knowing what to say.

Atkinson noticed his nervousness, and, glad to have some one to vent his ill-humor on, gave the boy a kick, exclaiming fiercely:

"Tell the Yank your message, you black hound! He's one of your friends. Give him your message. A Yank and a nigger are good friends."

Sol heard the words, and his blue eye flashed; but he said nothing, while the boy delivered his message:

"Please, Marse Yank, de marster wants to see ye, at de haouse."

"I'll come," Sol quietly assented.

Then he went up to Atkinson, who turned a shade paler as he saw him advance, and said to the steward, in a low voice:

"You kicked that boy for nothen. Beg his pardon, or I'll have to give you a lesson!"

The steward glared at him, half terrified, but with a bitter sneer on his lip.

"I'm not begging niggers' pardons, this year. If you want to get into trouble, you'll go on as you are going."

"Very well," returned Sol, tranquilly; "then you'll have to take your lesson, as well as the rest. I never allow no bad manners around me."

And before the steward knew what he was about, he had seized Atkinson by the back of the neck, and plunged him into the horse-trough, head-first, holding him there, kicking and struggling, till he was almost strangled and quite helpless.

Then he pulled him out and set him on his feet, remarking:

"My old mother told me bad manners oughter allers be punished. Good-day to you!"

And he followed the trembling negro, who had witnessed the whole transaction with his eyes bulging out of his head, and walked across the yard, when he heard a sharp click behind him, at which he wheeled round, to find that Atkinson had drawn his revolver, and had just pulled the trigger.

The weapon had been thoroughly wetted in the trough, and refused to go off, though the irate steward tried again and again, Sol watching him as coolly as ever.

When Atkinson at last threw the pistol down, with an angry curse, the Hercules laughed.

"It don't lie in your boots to kill me," he said; "and if you try it again, you'll git a worse lesson than before, Jim Atkinson. Your manners wants a good deal of trainin', I see."

The steward shook his fist with a savage scowl, as he said, through his set teeth:

"I'll git squar' with you fur this, yet—see ef I don't."

Sol shrugged his shoulders.

"Your kind ain't dangerous," was all he said; and he walked off to the house, preceded by the negro, who piloted him to the front of the veranda, saying, in a low, awe-struck voice:

"Dat 'ar gentleman on de piazzy, he's marster."

Sol now became aware that the veranda before him was full of ladies and gentlemen, and that Bigbee was beckoning to him to come forward.

The young man had never seen much of ladies' society, and the blood rushed into his face as he went toward the company assembled, the more so that all eyes were riveted on him, and that the regard was by no means entirely friendly, in many instances.

The gentlemen of the party were dressed, for the most part, in the fancy velveteens that were worn by Bigbee himself, and all had pistols in their belts, while the ladies lolled about the veranda, in hammocks or rocking-chairs.

He ascended the steps of the veranda, hardly seeing where he was going, and the first words he heard came from Bigbee, in the form of an introduction:

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think of this, for a real, unadulterated Yankee? This is the man I told you of, that can throw a steer single-handed, and never allows bad manners near him."

CHAPTER VIII.

THROWING THE BULL.

SOL straightened up and tried to look as if he did not mind the battery of eyes to which he was subjected; but without success. In spite of himself they made him drop his own, and he stood there, awkwardly twirling his hat in his hands.

Then he heard the voice of a lady, from the back part of the veranda, say, in a low tone, as if in confidence to some one else:

"He's too good-looking for a Yankee. But he won't stay here long."

Sol raised his eyes and looked over to where he fancied the owner of the voice must be sitting. That part of the veranda was in shade, and he could only catch the outline of a white dress, but the voice was a pleasant one.

Then he noticed a yellow-faced gentleman who sat next to his host, and this gentleman was staring at him and appeared to be about to speak.

"He's a pretty good man, Bigbee," he remarked, "but he won't do for Texas."

Sol faced him to ask innocently:

"Why not, sir?"

The yellow-faced man stared hard at him, as if he resented the question. For a half-minute he made no answer, and then said in the driest of ways possible:

"We don't like Yankees hyar, my friend. You're a right fine-looking fellow, and it's a pity you came hyar."

He actually seemed to be regretful for the young giant, on account of his splendid physique; and another man remarked:

"You're right, major. The boys will have him bored full of holes, before long. He's just the size to make a good target."

Sol began to feel uncomfortable. He had fancied that the ranchero had taken a fancy to him; and yet the tone of the remarks to which he was being subjected was decidedly disagreeable.

Colonel Bigbee seemed to see this, and interposed hastily:

"There, there, gentlemen; don't forget that you are not on the same level with the hands on the ranch. Sol, I sent for you, to show the ladies what you can do. They don't believe that you can throw a steer, single-handed and on foot. I've sent for a good hard fighter to come here, and give you a chance. Will you do it for us?"

Here the yellow-faced gentleman said, with an open sneer:

"What's the use of asking him? If he's your man, give him the order."

Sol flushed hotly as he heard the remark, and turned on the man who had spoken, with a squaring of the shoulders that set off his splendid figure to advantage.

"The cunnel axed me instead of orderin' me," he said, "'cause he knows what manners air, sir. In the parts I come from, manners air never thrown away," and turning to Bigbee, he resumed:

"I'll do it with pleasure, cunnel, to oblige you and the ladies."

He noticed, as he spoke, that all the men kept their eyes on him, and when he had finished, one of the ladies whispered audibly:

"What a pity he comes from New England. He actually behaves like a gentleman."

Sol heard the words, and saw the lady who uttered them. She was a handsome creature, with a pale olive complexion, and the finest black eyes he had ever seen. There was, moreover, an air of gentleness and kindness, which was peculiarly grateful to him, in the midst of the glances of dislike and hostility that met him on every side.

Bigbee also seemed to be good-natured, for he said in a soothing manner:

"That's a good fellow. We don't want to be hard on you, and Miss Nunez is right. You ought to have been born in Texas, for you act as if you belonged to us."

"Thankee, sir," replied Sol quietly; "but in the parts where I come from, they don't think nothen of a man if he ain't got manners. Whenever you send the steer on, sir, I'm ready to throw him fur the ladies."

Bigbee nodded to the negro boy who was waiting outside, and the latter sped away at a run.

The rest of the company looked at Sol, as if he were some curious animal, while he stood awkwardly there, not knowing exactly how to get out of the veranda, till the sound of the low bellow of an excited steer, told him that the animal was being driven up to the front of the house.

Then he bowed hastily to Bigbee, saying:

"Excuse me, sir."

With that, he backed from the veranda and walked down the steps, as around the corner of the house came, not a steer, but a bull, of large size, with the wickedest eye ever seen on an animal!

It came straight at Sol with a low grumbling bellow, and he heard a scream on the veranda, showing that the aspect of the beast had frightened the ladies.

He had no time to look back, or he would have discovered that all the people on the veranda had risen and crowded to the front, to see the sport; but, as for himself, his whole attention was taken up with the ugly beast.

Its short horns made the feat of throwing it much more dangerous than that of tripping a steer. He would have to exert his utmost strength and skill to avoid defeat or bodily harm.

He had not long to think over the matter, for the bull was almost on him, and he had to jump aside with the utmost celerity, to avoid being pinned on its vicious horns.

But the skip was made with due skill, and the charge of the excited beast failed of its aim. Sol's jacket was nearly being torn by one of the horns, but the smooth, tough velveteen slipped off, and before the animal could turn on him, the active young Hercules was close beside its shoulder, and there he stuck, following it so closely that the bull could not get away from him, or get its head round to charge.

Sol had grasped it by the horns, with his tremendous strength, thrown one foot over the nearest horn, and hung there, a little on one side, letting the bull toss him about as much as it liked, yielding to the motions of the head, but hanging with all his weight on the neck of the irate animal, with the advantage of a great leverage.

It was a tough ride, on account of the strength and quickness with which the bull tossed its head about; but the man, taking such a strange ride, had done the trick before, and knew just how much he could stand. The only difference, between the bull he was riding and a steer, was that the horns were shorter, and he could not take his favorite seat, with one leg over the horn, and under the cheek of the animal.

None the less surely he was tiring Taurus out, and at last the animal stopped its mad efforts to throw its rider, and rested with its head on the ground for an instant to take breath.

That moment Sol gave the head a wrench to

one side, took his leg off from the animal's neck, and kicked the fore-leg of the bull, as he had done with the steer.

Deprived of its support, down went the animal as if it had been shot; and the active New Hampshire Hercules, in that instant, had leaned over, got hold of the bull's tail, twisted it under one hind leg, and had the bull on its side, in such a position it could not rise.

Three or four times it tried in vain to do so; but each time, just as the spectators thought it would get the best of the man, the solid man gave a heave of his giant form, tugging at the tail, and brought the bull down again, with a whack, on the hard gravel.

The way in which the animal tried to rise—its hind-quarters first, after the fashion of its kind—aided him in his cunning plan, for there was an instant when its balance was easily disturbed, and in that instant it was thrown, every time.

After the third trial, the bull lay still for a moment, and Colonel Bigbee called out:

"Do you want a rope, Sol?"

The Hercules looked up from where he was half crouched over the bull, the tail grasped in his hand, and answered:

"If you want him tied, cunnel, I'll tie him; but you didn't tell me that. You said you wanted him throwed, and here he is, throwed—Ah, would ye?"

The last remark was addressed to the bull, which made a frantic effort to rise, excited by the voice of his conqueror; and Sol had all he could do to throw it again, which he did with a force that brought the beast to the ground, with a shock heard a hundred yards off.

Then he took his seat on the bull's flank, with the tail so tightly grasped that another effort could not be made, without overcoming the passive resistance of his weight, on the place whence the bull had to rise first; and after a few more struggles, the animal lay still, its sides heaving, its head turned round to stare at Sol, with an air of wonder and fear, that showed it to be conquered and cowed.

The Bull Slinger had been watching it closely, all the time, as one who had much knowledge of bovine nature, and as soon as he saw the bull turn its head, he loosened his grasp on the tail, and took off his broad hat, with which he bowed to the ladies on the veranda, observing:

"The thing's did, ladies and gentlemen. If ye want me to tie the beast, I'm ready; but he's whipped, and he knows it. If I let him up, he'll be civil fur a while."

"Let him up, then," ordered Bigbee, who had been watching the affair curiously.

Sol instantly got up from the bull's flank, and stood by the fallen beast. The bull did not offer to stir. It was as tame as a horse that had been thrown by the Rarey system, and could not realize that it was free.

The conqueror had to wave his hat to encourage it to rise; and even then it did so slowly, and stood there, lashing its tail to and fro, as if half inclined to make another fight, but undecided on the point.

Sol stepped close up to its neck, and threw his arm round it, the bull offering no resistance, when a burst of clapping came from the veranda, which had the effect of frightening the animal, so that it made a bound to one side and set off, full gallop, bellowing as viciously as ever, but running from the presence of its conqueror, with such evident fear that the very disturbance produced by the applause was an additional triumph for the Granite State man.

Then Colonel Bigbee, with a careless nod, observed to the young man:

"Much obliged to you, Sol. You have won quite a little sum of money for me, from Major Rhett; and I won't forget it. Who rigged you up so fine? I'm afraid you've been playing roots on Atkinson; haven't you?"

Sol looked up, with a twinkle in his eye that showed his naturally ready wit, as he answered:

"I knowed you wanted the ladies to see me, cunnel, and up in aour parts they allers say a man oughter look his prettiest when ladies is round. Hope you're all satisfied?"

There was a slight titter from the ladies, and Sol heard one of them, with the same disregard for his presence that all had exhibited, as if he were a creature from another planet, say:

"Decidedly he ought not to have been born a Yank."

Sol swept his broad hat to the ground, as he replied:

"Thankee, marm. But ef it's all the same to you, I ain't ashamed to hail from the biggest nation on the face of the 'arth—the same you b'long to, marm, ef I ain't mistook. Will ye want me any more to-night cunnel?"

Bigbee suppressed a smile as he answered:

"No, thank you, Sol. Good-night."

The young stranger swept a low obeisance to the ladies on the veranda, and walked off, the sound of voices behind him showing that the company was animatedly discussing his merits.

Major Rhett, as he saw the tall figure disappear, observed with a thoughtful air:

"He's a good man, Bigbee; but the boys won't forget he's a Yank. You'll see you'll have a lot of trouble about him, yet."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FEAST-DAY.

FROM the time he threw the bull for the ladies of the ranch the life of Sol was changed. He had paid his footing—so to speak—and had attained the respect of his companions.

With the cowboys of the ranch he had but little intercourse, his own work being at the slaughter-house, which they only visited to drive in cattle, when all hands were too busy to attend to anything but their own special work. His friends were mostly among the Mexicans; but the Mesquite Ranch being in the southern part of the State, there were, as in all Spanish neighborhoods, a good many feast-days, when the Mexicans would not work, and when the cowboys took their share in the holidays after their own fashion, which consisted in a general drunk and a free fight.

On one of these feast-days, dedicated to Santa Maria de Guadalupe—to wit, on the fifteenth of December, at the most delightful time of the year in that Southern clime—Sol took his way into the prairie, toward the neighboring ranch of Major Rhett, known as "Guadalupe Ranch," in honor of the Spanish inhabitants of the State.

He took this direction at the invitation of one of the major's *vaqueros*, called Carlos Rivera, who had taken a great fancy to Sol, and treated him with great courtesy.

In fact, since the Yankee had been at the ranch he had found the Mexicans a good deal the most pleasant part of the inhabitants, and had grown to like them very well; at the same time that he found himself drifting further and further away from association with the cowboys, who seemed unable to forget that he had come from the North, and disliked him still more for associating with the men they called "Greasers."

Yet Sol always found the "Greasers" very pleasant fellows, with a smile and a kind word always ready for him, and had grown to like them well.

He had found, in spite of his weight, that the little mustangs of the country were capable of carrying him, and on the day when he set out for Guadalupe Ranch, was mounted for the first time since he had been at the ranch.

He found the Mexicans at Guadalupe Ranch engaged in their national sports of "throwing the bull" and "running the cock."

The first of these feats consisted in riding alongside of a bull at great speed, and endeavoring to throw the animal by catching it by the tail and slinging it sideways, a task that was frequently accomplished.

"Running the cock" was a much more difficult feat.

A game-cock was buried up to the neck in the prairie, with only its head above the ground, and the aim of the riders was to gallop past the bird, and then, by stooping from the saddle, to wrench its head off at a single clutch.

This was a very difficult feat, for the bird always dodged, and the most that could be done was to pluck out a few feathers, save by the most expert horsemen. The cock was provided by a Mexican, who made a gambling scheme of it, making the riders pay so much a chance, the bird going to the man who could pluck its head off.

Only one man succeeded in this; but Sol, though he was invited to participate in the sport, refused on the ground of humanity. He made up for what the Mexicans thought his "squeamishness" in this, by throwing a bull in his own fashion, on foot, a feat which excited the unbounded admiration of the Mexicans, who had heard of it before.

When the night at last came and the feast was over, he took leave of his Mexican entertainers; but Carlos Rivera insisted on riding home with him over the prairie in the light of the full moon, which made the place quite bright.

Sol tried to get rid of it; but the polite Mexican would not be denied, and they set out for Mesquite Ranch, with quite a little cavalcade of horsemen.

The Mexicans were all more or less full of *pulque*—their national drink—and sung as they rode, while every one was in the best possible humor, till they got near the Mesquite Ranch, when they became aware of something unusual being abroad on the prairie.

The first sign of this came to the sense of hearing, in a low, rumbling noise, accompanied by a tremulous motion of the ground; while the horses of the party began to fidget and snort as they went on, with their ears cocked forward, as if ready to start at anything they might see, but not certain what that might be.

Then they saw a dark line on the prairie in the moonlight, and the noise increased every moment, when one of the Mexicans exclaimed:

"A stampede! What has happened?"

A stampede it was sure enough, and the whole mass of the panic-stricken animals was headed directly toward them; the line being so long they saw they would have to turn and go with the crowd of animals, or be swept away by it.

They turned to ride across the front and try to reach the flank of the black mass they could

now distinguish plainly, as it came; but the experiment proved too hazardous to last long, for the speed of the mass would soon have caused them to be overtaken had they not turned.

The best they could do was to edge away as they rode, and try to scrape clear of the great mass, which seemed to be composed of cattle and horses of all kinds, wild with terror.

What was the cause of the stampede no one could divine, and it was as much as any one's life was worth to try and investigate it till on the flank of the herd.

After about an hour's hard riding they got into this position at last, and let the mass rush by, when they perceived in the rear of the herd several hundred Indians driving them on. The stampede was explained with a vengeance.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHIRICAHUAS.

THE sight of the Indians explained the stampede, and with one accord the Mexicans of the party reined in their horses, and turned to flee for their lives, screaming loudly to each other to run.

Solid Sol, whose pony was not fully up to his weight, saw, from the first moment, that flight would be a useless course with him; and though he turned his pony's head, did not offer to ride fast; so that the Indians, who began to yell as soon as they saw the party, detaching a number of warriors after them, found no difficulty in coming up with the big man on the small horse, and getting all round him as they rode.

Then, as they began to shoot arrows at him, he drew both his pistols—for he had come down to Texan ways now, and always went armed—and returned the fire, pulling up his pony and jumping off, with a coolness that surprised them, to take a steadier aim.

So deadly was his fire, and absolutely fearless his attitude, that the warriors, who had come swooping down on him, thinking to have an easy prey, hung back from his bullets, and threw themselves over the sides of their ponies, circling round him at a respectful distance, while the giant stood by the side of his pony, one arm thrown over the animal's back, protected on that side by its body, while he fired shot after shot, with all the care and deliberation of a man before a target.

Not a shot would he throw away; and he stood there as if he had been invulnerable; while the Indians circled round him and sent arrow after arrow at him, till his clothes fairly bristled with them, and it seemed a miracle that he remained alive and erect.

He was all alone among his foes, for the Mexicans were far away by this time, and there was no such thing as help near him; yet he flinched not, but stood up to the Indians, with a smile on his face, in a manner that compelled their admiration, in spite of themselves.

Perhaps this was the reason that, when he had fired his last shot, and stood up as boldly as ever, they hesitated to come near him, and were compelled to throw a lasso over his head, from a long way off, by surprise, hoping to snatch him off his feet and make a prisoner of the bravest white man they had ever met, with a view to unlimited torture, when they should get him safely to their village in the far-away Sierra.

But even when the lasso had settled round his neck, the enormous strength of the young giant stood him in good stead, for he clutched the rope with such force that the pony, which was galloping away to drag him at its heels, was thrown on its haunches, and Sol had the noose off his neck and under one arm, before any one could get nigh him to strike a blow.

Then he hung back a moment and got at his knife, when a rapid slash divided the rope, just in time to escape the thrust of a lance, in the hands of the chief of the party.

By a wriggle of the body, Sol escaped the thrust, and the next instant caught the shaft of the lance, wrested it from the owner's hand and was mowing a circle round him, using the long shaft like a club, and sweeping Indians from their horses at every clip.

Still the contest was too unequal to last forever; and at last an unseen lasso flew over his head while he was hotly engaged in front, with several foes; and Sol was snatched from his feet and knocked senseless, by the contact of his head with the hard ground.

How long he remained in this unconscious condition he was not aware, of course; but he was awakened by a feeling of pain in his head, and found that an Indian was quietly engaged in trying to scalp him, with a very dull knife, having already started the skin about one temple.

The wrenching of the hair, the wrong way, caused such an acute pain that it awoke the young giant effectually, and in a moment he had thrown his arms around the Indian who was scalping him, brought him under him, wrenched the knife from his hand, stabbed him dead, and was bounding from side to side in the midst of the amazed and demoralized savages who had thought him dead, striking with such tremendous strength that none could resist him.

It would only have been a question of a few moments more, however, when he must have

been overcome and killed, when the sounds of shots and yells, close by, announced that help was coming at last, tardy as it had been.

Sol heard the yells, and fought harder than ever, while his foes, seeing that their game was up (for they had become separated from their main body), began to waver, and finally fled in disorder, chased off the field by a number of American cowboys, who came racing up at full speed, alarmed by the reports of the panic-struck Mexicans, that the Indians had made a raid from Mexico and swept the stock of half the county at one swoop.

Then the big fellow from New Hampshire found himself alone on the field, the fight having swept past him, while his pony had been killed, and he felt the blood flowing from more than one place on his body and limbs, which were sore enough.

A close examination, however, convinced him that he was not seriously hurt, though he had received several arrow-wounds, and had been "blazed" by more than one bullet.

He felt strong enough to pursue the way toward the Mesquite Ranch, at which he arrived, to find it deserted, every available man on the ranch having started on the trail of the Indian raiders.

The only appearance of life about the place was at the ranch-house, where the ladies resided, for that was all ablaze with lights; and, as he walked past the stables, toward the piazza, he was greeted by several feminine voices, in tones of considerable apprehension, asking who he was and what was the news.

Then the young man found that the men of the ranch had all gone, leaving none but a few negro servants and the ladies behind.

These latter were terrified half out of their lives, for they had been free from Indian raids for many years in that part of Texas, and the greater part of the ladies were visitors to Colonel Bigbee, who was a bachelor, and whose sister had kept house for him since he had come to Texas.

Sol Piper had a general idea of all this from the gossip of the ranch; but in his dazed state, with the blood flowing from several wounds, he had forgotten all about the ladies, and was thinking only of finding his way to the stables, for a new horse and saddle, when the voice of one of the ladies called out:

"Sir, sir, please, sir!"

Weak and dizzy as he was, the sound caused him to turn with all his native politeness, asking:

"What kin I do fur ye, ma'am?"

Then he saw a face, the sight of which fairly made him stagger, as if he had been struck, so overcome was he with the beauty that shone therein, as the owner inquired:

"Oh, sir, please, sir, have you seen anything of Colonel Bigbee since he went away?"

Sol shook his head.

"No, marm, I hain't seen no one but the Injuns, and they nigh got me and killed my hoss, or I wouldn't be here naow."

He was staring at the girl who addressed him as if he could not remove his eyes, and she, on her part, seemed utterly unconscious of anything but her own anxiety, as she continued:

"Oh, I am so frightened! We heard a noise and shouting, and then the boys came running to tell us that the Indians were taking the stock, and my cousin called for his horse and rode away, and that is all that we know of it. Have you not heard anything, sir? Are you quite sure?"

All this while Sol was staring at her and taking in every detail of the face, which was unlike anything he had seen before about the ranch-house.

Miss Clara Nunez had been the belle of the ranch before, and he remembered her face pretty well. But Clara Nunez was as dark as a quadron, while the young lady who was questioning him so anxiously in the light of the piazza-lamps was a blonde of the purest and most angelic type, with great, serious, dark-blue eyes and the brightest of golden hair. Her complexion was of the peculiar, delicate, wild-rose bloom, so rare and beautiful; while the whole expression of her face, as she spoke to him, with clasped hands and pleading air, was that of anxious entreaty.

"Are you quite sure you have not seen or heard of him?" she repeated.

"We are all so anxious about him, and he is so rash."

"If you mean Cunnel Bigbee, miss—" said Sol, hesitatingly.

"Yes, yes, it is he I mean, of course. He is my cousin, and the kindest cousin in the world. Have you not seen him to-night? Which way did you come?"

The questions came rapidly and impulsively, as she leaned forward in the lamplight, while a bevy of frightened girls huddled behind her on the piazza, as if afraid to come any closer, to speak to the rough-looking fellow outside.

Sol was not aware how ugly he looked himself; for his gay dress was covered with mud and dust, while the blood had flowed down his face from the slash of the Indian's knife in his temple, and had dried there, making a complete mask.

CHAPTER XI. SOL'S MISSION.

As well as he could, for the confused way in which the ladies began to question him, Sol told them all he knew. He had been returning from the Guadalupe Ranch when he had come on the raiders, and had no idea of the whereabouts of Colonel Bigbee, unless he had been with the party of cowboys that had come up just in time to rescue him, Sol, from the clutches of the Indians.

If the colonel was with that band he had probably come up with the Indians in force ere that, and from what he had seen, in his first glimpse of their numbers, he had no idea that the cowboys had an easy task before them.

The news he gave seemed to make the ladies more anxious than they had been before, and the golden-haired girl, whom the others called "Bessie Bell," was wringing her hands and lamenting over the fate of her cousin, whom she vowed "she would never see again," when a sudden impulse made the New Hampshire man speak:

"Don't ye cry, miss. If the cunnel's above ground I'll bring him back to ye, or my name ain't Sol Piper."

Then Clara Nunez, who had been in the background, seemed to recognize him for the first time through the blood and dirt that disguised him, and asked:

"Are you the man they call Solid Sol? The one that throws the cattle all alone?"

Sol touched his hat respectfully, as he replied:

"That's me, miss." "Then if you want us to think well of you after this, go and find Colonel Bigbee," she said earnestly. "Every Texas man on the ranch has gone, and they will all be wanted. You are big enough to have a heart, if that is a thing you Yankees ever have."

Sol started slightly as he heard the scornful way in which she spoke, and demanded:

"Don't ye think Yanks have any hearts, miss?"

The tones of the haughty girl were full of scorn, as she replied:

"I suppose so, the same as an ox or a rabbit. But not like our men. If you had, you wouldn't be here now."

Bessie Bell here pulled the sleeve of the other, and whispered, in a pleading way:

"Ah! don't you see he is hurt, Clara?"

"Hurt! Of course I do! But so are some of our men, too. But they don't come here to hide. They stay in the field, till the enemy is whipped. Don't talk to me, Bessie Bell. I hate a Yankee, as I hate a snake!"

The girl, now that something had occurred to excite her, seemed to be as bitter as she had said; and Sol, as he heard her taunts, drew himself up, to reply, in a tone that all the girls on the piazza heard distinctly:

"The time may come, miss, when you may want a Yankee's help, and be glad to get it, too!"

Then, turning to Bessie Bell, he added, in a manner as courtly as if he had been bred in the best society:

"You, at least, do not hate me, madam; and I thank you for your politeness. Your manners are good enough for any lady. I will bring you back your cousin, if he be above ground. Good-night!"

So saying, he turned and stalked away, followed by a silence that was more expressive than words, and that showed him he had made some impression on the group of thoughtless girls, whose old prejudices had been so deeply ingrained that nothing seemed able to drive them out.

As for himself, he went to the stables, for he knew that it would be useless to try the open corral, where the horses were usually caught for the saddle. The Indians had swept that clean, long before.

There was a bare chance that the stable, being under cover and possibly locked at the time of the raid, might have escaped the worst of the visitation, while it was certain that any horse he might find there was sure to be above the average of the ponies on the ranch elsewhere.

As he approached the building, he was made aware that, whatever might have become of the white men on the ranch, the negroes had not gone with them. Old Uncle Zip was standing by the stable door, with a knot of his sable subordinates, discussing the event that had just happened in low tones, as they saw the tall figure of the New Hampshire giant approaching them, and Sol shouted:

"Hallo, you, Zip, where are all the boys gone?"

Old Zip instantly drew back to the stable door, and half closed it, while he answered, in the consequential, suspicious way he always had used to Sol, ever since he had found out that he came from the Northern States:

"Dem all done gone. Whar you come from, you no know dat, Yank?"

Sol knew that the old man had all the prejudices and superstitions of his class, having been brought up as a family slave; and that, if he said anything to irritate him, before he got to the door, Zip was certain to lock him out, and

give him all the trouble he could. But the Yankee schoolmaster-tramp-cowboy, who had done well so far on the Mesquite Ranch, by the exercise of his native shrewdness, was not the man to let an ignorant old negro irritate him into doing anything imprudent; so he answered, in a way that he knew would strike a sympathetic chord in Zip's breast:

"I jest lost my hoss and got done up pretty bad in the muss, Mr. Zippaniah, and the cunnel tole me as you was powerful good on curin' gunshot wounds. Will ye give this one of mine a look, please?"

Old Zip came down instantly, for his pride was touched.

"Marse Cunnel Bigbee, he tell you jess rite, white man," he said, grinning, so that his white teeth shone in the moonlight. "Whar you hit and what wid?"

Sol made no reply till he had got close enough to the old negro to make sure that he could not be locked out of the stable, and then he got his big frame inside the door as he said:

"I ain't hit bad enough to hurt much; but I want a hoss. Mine's gone, and I know thar's some in the stable big enough to carry me. Come, git aout of the way, old man."

And the old negro was too much in awe of the gigantic strength he had often seen displayed on the ranch to make any serious resistance, though he grumbled loudly and called on the other men round the place to help him.

They knew better, however, than to interfere with Sol, and even the dogs, on whom he called in his desperation, refused to obey him, for they had got used to seeing Sol round the place and could not understand that he could be regarded as an enemy, in any contingency.

Within ten minutes from the time Sol struck the stables he was riding out again, mounted on one of the big carriage-horses in which Colonel Bigbee took such pride, having imported them expressly from the State of Pennsylvania, where they had been bred between the big Conestoga horse and thoroughbred stock, till they were fit for chargers for the heaviest of heavy cavalry.

The big Yankee had taken the colonel's best Sunday saddle, and had armed himself as best he could with what weapons were left, for he had lost his own in the skirmish with the Indians, and the cowboys had swept the place clear of almost everything else.

His pistols were gone. He had found, hanging up in the harness-room, behind the stable, an ancient saber, that had been the property of Colonel Bigbee during the war, though like most Southern cavalry soldiers, he had seldom or never used it, and took no pride in it. Since he had come home it had hung by his old war-saddle, as an emblem of the past, of no practical use, and Sol's eyes lighted up as he took the ancient weapon and girt it on, for he knew that the colonel had had it ground sharp at one time, and was confident that, in his hands, it might not prove so unserviceable as the Texan seemed to think it.

The saber was the only weapon to be found; but it had its belt, and Sol girt it on when he rode out.

Then he took his way over the moonlit prairie, on the trail of the stampede, which was as broad and plain to be seen as a high road, on account of the multitude of animals that had crossed it so recently.

The negroes stared after him, half in wonder, half in fear; for he had taken an animal that not one would have ventured to think of riding any more than of flying; and old Zipsaid, shaking his head, as he looked after the bold adventurer:

"Dat all very well now, but jess let dat Yank wait till Marse Tom git hold of him a-ridin' dat hoss an' see whar he'll be! Jiminy Cricket! He'll string up de darn Yank so quick he'll make his head swim afore dey done git him h'isted."

The other negroes seemed to have much the same ideas as Zip, as to the probable fate of the big Yankee, if the colonel caught him riding one of his favorite span of carriage-horses; but in the mean time Sol rode on, blissfully unconscious of what they were saying, till he reached the place where he had had his own battle with the Indians, which he found strewn with weapons and dead horses.

Picking up an Indian lance, as he went, he rode on, following the trail of the cowboys.

CHAPTER XII. THE LONE SCOUT.

THE raid which had been so successful, thus far, in Mesquite county, was one of those dashes organized by Indians living within the limits of Mexico which owed their origin to the American civil war. Before that time, the Indians over the border had been in too much terror of their Texan neighbors and the regular troops stationed all down the Rio Grande, to give any trouble; but as soon as the war had drawn away soldiers and Texans alike, the temptation became too great for the Indians to resist; and from that time they had begun to raid that way.

Their success had been so great that they kept it up after the close of the war, when the danger became much greater, though the raid that had surprised Mesquite county, in the manner

we have seen, was the first that had been in that part of Texas since the war—most of the lawless expeditions going a little further to the west.

The Indians had taken every one by surprise, by making their dash at a time when the U. S. troops were away on a distant scout. They had further timed their assault when the cowboys were off their guard, enjoying the feast-day; and at the moment when Sol mounted the carriage mare, and set out on the trail, the Chiricahuas—for they belonged to that terrible tribe—to the number of three hundred warriors, were driving before them a mass of at least ten thousand head of horses and cattle, while, more than five miles behind them, the owners of the stolen herds were toiling along, trying to get together enough fighting-men to make it safe to press the Indians closely.

Once they had tried it to their sorrow, losing several men in the attack, after which they had been content to dog the Indians at a distance, without venturing to press them closer than politeness permitted.

Solid Sol came up with them, therefore, within a matter of ten miles of the ranch, and was first made aware of their proximity by the sounds of dropping shots fired at the Indians in front from a distance, and hearing the low grumbling of the herds, far in advance.

The big man rode hard after the cowboys, who had now gathered, to the number of some fifty or sixty men, including the men from the two American ranches, and came up with them at last, to find that Colonel Bigbee and his friend, Major Rhett, were trying to get the men into the humor for another charge, while they, on their part, were evidently hanging back, as if they had no stomach for the perilous task.

As soon as they saw Sol, Colonel Bigbee rode up to him, much to the surprise of the New Hampshire man, in a towering passion, and demanded "how he had dared to take that horse from the stable? Did he suppose the Bigbees kept thousand-dollar stock for *Yankees* to ride on?"

Thus shouting at the astonished young man, Bigbee ordered him off the big horse, and told him to "foot it if he wanted to catch the Indians. As for the rest of them, they could get along without him."

Sol was surprised at the angry address, so different from his usual way; but the Texan was irritated to the verge of madness by the way in which the Indians had swept all he had, save the buildings of the ranch; and, having missed Sol in the first fight, had imagined him to have skulked through cowardice.

"Git off the horse!" he repeated, fiercely, "if you don't want to get laid out for horse-stealing. You know what that means in Texas? I want no *Yankees* to help me take care of my property."

Sol saw, from the excited glitter of his eye, and the pistol he had cocked in his hand, that he would shoot in another moment; so he got off the horse without more ado, saying:

"Ef I'd 'a' knowed you was a-gwine to treat me 'ike this, cunnel, I'd ha' let the Indians go. I kin keep up with the rest of ye afoot, I guess, and we'll see who tires fu'st."

So saying, he set off at a dog-trot, which soon sent him to the advance of the horses, though the latter, in their spurts of speed, could leave him far behind. But the steady, persistent way in which Sol trotted along—the same which he had acquired in his career as a tramp, along with almost illimitable endurance—took him to the front in the end, when the animals tired after their gallops, and at last, to his surprise and gratification, he began to find that he was actually coming up with the Indians themselves and getting into a position midway between them and the cowboys.

He did not feel in the best of humors with Bigbee, from the way in which the colonel had taken him off the horse, and especially from the opprobrious manner in which the thing had been done; but as he caught sight of an Indian warrior dropping back from the main body to meet him, the Yankee schoolmaster smiled to himself, and said:

"Now, cunnel, we'll see whether your Southerners kin do any better'n a Yank, arter all."

He was on foot and alone, half a mile in advance of the nearest of his friends, if the cowboys could be called such. He was armed with an Indian lance, which he carried at a trail, and the colonel's old saber, which he had hoisted up on his back like a knapsack, to keep it from clattering and trailing.

The Indian coming toward him was mounted on a spotted pony, and riding at full speed, crouched over the neck of his charger, and holding his long lance presented before him. The big Yankee kept on his path unconcernedly till the other was within a hundred feet or so, when he dropped on one knee, and held the long lance before him, hoping to get the Indian to charge directly on it.

The silence with which the savage came on made him think that he was unprovided with firearms; but just at the moment when he expected to be ridden over, the Indian's pony

swerved to one side from the point of the lance, and at the same minute the rider made a vicious thrust with his own lance at Sol.

Ill would it have fared then with the man from New Hampshire, but for the enormous strength with which he was gifted, for he was taken by surprise, and had not the least idea of the mysteries of parrying. Instinctively he dropped his own weapon, and caught hold of the point, just in time to turn it from his breast, with his bare hands, when he wrenched it from its owner, and in another minute knocked him from his horse with a sweep of the staff.

To spring on the Indian and throttle him was the work of an instant to the Yankee Hercules, and even while the Indian was writhing in his grasp, and trying to draw his knife, Sol was beating out his brains, in grim silence, on the hard prairie.

Cool and watchful as ever, he had not neglected to set his foot on the end of the trailing lariat which the Indian pony wore, dragging from its halter, so that when the death of the Indian was accomplished, there stood the charger snorting at the end of the rope.

The Yankee Hercules looked rapidly round him, first at the cowboys behind; then at the Indians. Both were enough out of sight to make a quick disguise in the moonlight practicable, and he hesitated no more. Stooping to the dead Indian, he caught up the blanket and war-bonnet of the savage, with all the fluttering finery of ribbon streamers and feathers; put them on over his own clothes, and then vaulted on the pony in the character of an Indian warrior.

Straight on the trail of the other daring raiders he went, till the sight of another Indian riding back told him he had been seen and perhaps suspected.

He knew nothing of Indian character or language, but trusted to getting out of the scrape by sheer luck, as the investigating savage came riding toward him.

He began to pull at his pony and go as slow as he dared, to make the meeting take place at a distance from the main body, but the other, as if already suspicious, came at such a pace that he had no opportunity to fall back far.

The Indian met him and called out in Spanish: "Did you kill him?"

Sol started at the sounds of the language, for he had learned to speak it pretty well since his residence in Texas, and yet had no idea that the Indians used it among each other.

In the best Spanish he could command he answered:

"Yes! Come here!"

But there was something in his accent or words which told the other of the fraud that was being practiced on him, and the reply he made came in the shape of a flash and the sharp "pong" of a bullet, close to Sol's head.

The Yankee Hercules dodged down instinctively, but dug his spurs into the horse as he did so, and rushed straight at the Indian.

The other, seeing him come, opened fire with a revolver, firing shot after shot, every bullet missing Piper, but coming so uncomfortably close that he hardly expected to get to the Indian alive.

He did so, however, and ran him through with his lance as the other met him fairly with his own lance. The savage uttered a yell of pain and terror, and writhed off the horse to the ground, pinned to the earth by the impaling weapon, where Sol held him till he was dead. Then the Yankee Hercules smiled as he said:

"These fellers all wants manners taught 'em, and by ginger I'm the boy to teach 'em."

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE TO ONE.

THE Yankee giant hesitated but a few moments, after he had run the last warrior through with his lance. Then he turned his horse's head straight toward the Indians, and rode on.

He could faintly see, in the moonlight, the dark line of the cowboy party coming after him, but still far away; and knew that, if he engaged in a fight with the Indians, the cowboys were not likely to get up to him in time for any useful help; but he rode on, holding the lance in his hand, and leading the pony of the Indian he had just slain.

He had not far to go, when he saw three Indians dropping back from the party ahead, and his heart began to beat quicker, in spite of himself, as he saw them coming.

Had they detected his disguise at that distance or not? He had not long to wait to find out; for as soon as they came within hailing distance, they began to call out to him in Spanish, to know whether "he had counted the enemy or not?" from which he judged that they took him for the scout who had been sent back a little before, and whom he had killed.

He made no reply; but halted both horses, an action which excited the suspicions of his foes at once.

They yelled something to each other in a language he did not understand, and all three rode straight at him, with couched lances. The moment they did so, the giant uttered a responsive yell, and dashed in his spurs to meet them.

The spare pony he let go; but the animal, seeming to be used to the companionship of the horse he was riding, kept pace with it, neighing to the other horses in advance, and lending him great service, unwittingly, in shielding one side from a close attack.

He had but a vague idea of what he was going to do; but aimed to get all three Indians on the side of the led horse in front of his lance, which he held couched over his left arm. It was done instinctively, without any training; but it was the best thing he could have done; for they all tried to evade the assault, and to divide and take him on both sides. Thus, by the time they met, he was riding right across their path, having made a semicircle to escape being surrounded, and the led horse was in front of him as all three Indians thrust viciously at him, with their lances, together.

With the full strength of his arm, he cast his own lance right at one of the warriors, and such was the impetus of the horse, that he saw the weapon go through the man, and out on the other side, while the Indian threw up his arms with a strangled yell, and dropped from his pony.

The next moment Sol had whipped out the long keen saber, wheeled round his pony, and was closely engaged with the two remaining Indians, in a confused struggle, wherein the horses were close to each other; and where, without any idea of how he had done it, he had got inside the guard of the long lances, and had things all his own way. For in such a mêlée, a saber, ground as sharp as a razor, in the hands of a man of his strength, became a weapon of death.

He had no idea of fencing, no conception of anything but to cut as hard as he could; but his very first cut took one of the Indians across the face, despite the thin lance-shaft he raised to parry, sheared asunder the wood and took the savage's head off at one blow, above the mouth.

The remaining Indian, appalled at the sight, which he had never seen before (for swords are almost unknown things in modern Western warfare), turned to flee an instant too late.

Sol was close behind him as he turned, and he made another long sweeping cut, which reached the Indian, catching him on the left shoulder, and cutting a terrible gash, which laid open his lungs, and tumbled him from his horse, helpless and almost dead.

In a moment the big man was on his feet by the side of the savage, who, with the untamable ferocity of the wounded Indian, thinking only of revenge, was clutching feebly at a pistol in his belt. One more blow, and the arm that was clutching the pistol was shorn off near the elbow, when the Yankee muttered as he looked back at the distant cowboys:

"Guess one Yankee can do as much as any of ye."

Then he concluded that he would try no more experiments with the Indians; for he did not know how long his luck would hold out. He gathered the horses of the slain warriors together without any difficulty by the trailing lariats, stuck in his belt all the arms the Indians had about them, and when Colonel Bigbee and his friends came up about half an hour afterward they found Solid Sol, with five ponies, standing by the bodies of three dead Indians, ready to greet them with the cool remark:

"Ye see, cunnel, I needn't be beholden to no man for a horse, now."

The cool unconcern with which he spoke had its effect on the colonel, who had already repented of the harsh way he had spoken to the Yankee giant about the horse he had been riding, and he had the grace to say approvingly:

"You've done pretty well for a Yankee, Piper. How did you do it?"

Sol gave a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder at the distant Indians as he replied:

"By follerin' close, not by hangin' off, as if I was skeered. If you want your cattle back, cunnel, it's my b'lief you kin git 'em only one way. Them cusses will git over the river, if ye don't, and then where are ye?"

If he had used such a sneering tone at any other time the probability is that his reply would have been a shot from one of the cowboys, who hated him for being a Yankee. As it was, none of them could find it in his heart to show anger toward a man who had shamed them all by doing what none of them had dared to do.

Colonel Bigbee compressed his lips, and his eyes flashed as he asked the big man:

"And what is the way you mean to get them?"

"By goin' and takin' 'em," replied Sol, coolly. "One good charge, and you kin scatter 'em long enough to get back some of the beasts."

Bigbee frowned angrily as he retorted:

"What the devil do you know about war? Did you ever see a battle in all your life? You forget you are talking to men that played at that for four years, and whipped you Yanks many a time, too."

Sol shrugged his shoulders as he said:

"Seems to me that ain't the question now, cunnel. Mebbe ye did whip us often, but who got the best of it at last? You let the Injuns git the best of you jest now; but that ain't to

say they shed do it *all* the time. We Yanks *don't* stay whipped. Is you Southerners any better, or d'ye want the Injuns to go and make their brags over ye, how they took all the stock away from the ranch and ye didn't dare to take 'em back fur fear of gittin' whipped. I ain't askin' no man to go where I ain't goin' myself; but I've got through doin' all this alone. If the rest of you kin git on without the beasts, I'm agreeable."

His words had their effect on the men who were with Bigbee, and several voices cried:

"Yank's right. Let's go fur 'em. We can't but git killed, and the boys can't shame us for givin' in too soon."

Bigbee had been waiting for this; for, to do him justice, he was a brave man, but had been unable, so far, to induce his men to follow him for a second time after their first defeat.

This had been suffered while Sol was away at the ranch, in consequence of the cowboys having pursued their first advantage over the Indian rear-guard with too much rashness. They had driven this in easily, but had run on the main body before they were aware of it, and had been driven back in confusion by a sudden charge. Now the men were beginning to get back their hearts again, and Bigbee saw that the example of the man they had been accustomed to dislike as a Yankee had had its effect to spur them on again. Major Rhett, who was with the party, and who disliked Sol more than all the rest, put an end to the indecision by crying out:

"All you men who think a Yankee can shame a Southern gentleman kin stay behind. I'm one of them who thinks one Southerner kin whip ten Yanks. Come and show him that he ain't the only feller that kin fight Injuns, if he is as big as Goliath of Gath."

And with this he dashed off in advance at a rapid gallop, and the owner of the stolen stock followed his example, with the rest of the cowboys, who swept off at full speed, raising a yell as they went to warn the Indians that they were coming.

Sol remained where they had left him on the prairie, with his captured ponies round him, gazing after the cowboys with a smile, as he muttered:

"Never saw a battle, didn't I? Mebbe I didn't; but I've seen them that did, and *they* didn't think one Southerner could whip ten of 'em. Go ahead, gentlemen, and when ye git through mebbe ye'll want to see a Yank, arter all."

So saying, he quietly gathered together his captured horses, and proceeded to fasten two of them together in such a way that they would run side by side.

CHAPTER XIV.

RIDING DOUBLE.

ALL the while that Solid Sol was making his arrangements he was whistling "Yankee Doodle" in the most cheerful and unconcerned manner, as if no danger was near, and he did not interrupt the tune when the sounds of rapid firing showed that the engagement had begun in earnest once more.

He could hear the yells of savages and white men together, mingled with the cracking of pistols; but he went on with his task, and did not stop till he had four of the Indian ponies arranged in pairs, their saddles fastened together by stout lariats, so that the animals ran close together. The fifth pony he allowed to run loose beside the rest, relying on its habit of running in company to keep it there.

When he had finished he vaulted on the backs of one of his pairs with a grace and ease that showed him to have had a training in some place where such things were done, and laughed to himself as he said aloud:

"Guess that there circus warn't a bad place to larn to ride, arter all; if they *don't* know *nothin* about it."

Just as he completed his arrangements and vaulted on his pair of coupled horses the sounds of firing came nearer and nearer, and he perceived that the cowboys were being beaten back a second time, pursued by the Indians.

Then he caught up one of the lances he had brought with him; gave a yell to his horses, and dashed off with a speed that he could have attained in no other way with such small ponies on account of his weight.

In another moment he was into the midst of the rapidly-fleeing cowboys, and was apprised by the yells of the Indians and the way in which they stopped the pursuit that he had been seen, and that the savages did not understand his appearance.

His gigantic figure, seeming to hover in the air on the backs of the horses, was something they had never seen before, and it roused their superstition, the more that it was night, when Indians are the easiest to scare.

As he came, he raised a wild shout:

"Hooroar fur the Stars and Stripes! Go it, Texas! Here come the Yanks to help ye! Give it to the red cusses!"

And the cowboys, who, a moment before, were fleeing in demoralization from the onset of superior numbers, turned at once with a yell

of satisfaction, and began to fight better than they had done at any time; while the raiders turned and fled in confusion, till the whole mob of pursuers and pursued was mingled up with the mass of animals that the Indians had driven from the ranch, and sped on, over the moonlit prairie, in a confused mob, mile after mile, shots and yells alternating with the screams of frightened horses and the bellowing of cattle, till the whole was arrested by the waters of the Rio Grande, glittering in the moonlight, at which the hunted animals turned instinctively and huddled together, trying to halt and turn back.

Then indeed the tables were turned on the Indians. They would have had a good deal of trouble, in all probability, to drive the herds into the river, even without the annoyance they were suffering from their foes; but when the cattle refused to go on, and the cowboys were there to help them, while the yells of others, further up the bank, announced that the whole county had been roused and was gathering to avenge the raid, then at last the Chiricahuas broke in confusion and fled into the river, leaving the cattle and some of their dead behind them, the cowboys raising a shrill yell of triumph as they saw them in the river.

The Indians heard it and turned in the water, to shoot away all the ammunition they had about them, fearing they were to be chased still further into the water.

Then came a sudden reverse, as a small party of the Chiricahuas, who had been separated from the rest, came charging down to the bank, taking with them, in the stampede, quite a band of horses; and Colonel Bigbee, seeing that some of his most valuable stock was in a way to be lost, called out to his men to follow, and dashed into the water all alone.

The moment he had done so, a shot, coming from the river, dropped his horse into the water; and then came a confused struggle by the bank, at the end of which the cowboys saw their red foes gathered round the horse with which Bigbee had fallen, carrying off the rider to the further shore, a result they were unable to prevent.

The Indians still outnumbered them nearly two to one, and they were too much occupied in saving what stock they had rescued from the raid to be particular about rescuing any person.

In the confusion of the fight, but few had noticed Bigbee, and when the news spread that he had been captured, it was too late to do anything to rescue him. The Indians were on the further bank of the river, where they were galloping up and down, yelling all sorts of insults to the cowboys, trying to induce them to come over after them on Mexican soil, where they could get them at a disadvantage.

Solid Sol, who had been galloping up and down in his strange equipage, performing all sorts of feats in the fight, did not hear of the fate of the colonel till they were preparing to go back, and as soon as he did so, he said emphatically:

"Boys, the cunnel allers showed good manners to me; and if the Injuns has got him, they've got to give him up. Who'll go along with me and git his body back?"

No one answered. They thought he could not possibly be serious in what he said.

The New Hampshire man looked round at them, as if he was surprised beyond measure, and demanded:

"What? Ain't there one of you chivalry fellers dare foller a Yank acrost that river? I don't ask no man to go where I don't go myself. You've b'en tellin' me, ever sence I come here, how you Southern men was devils to fight; and here's your chance; and ain't ye goin' to take it? The cunnel never showed me bad manners but onst; and that was when I took a hoss without asking leave. He's allers treated me like a gentleman; and that's more'n I kin say fur the rest of ye. I'm goin' over that river, to bring back the cunnel, dead or alive, I don't care which; but I ain't goin' to leave him in the hands of them Injun savages, over there. Now, who'll foller me?"

Again he looked round, and was met with lowering glances, as Rhett answered:

"You're talkin' too much, Yank, fur your own good. We know when we've got enough, and we ain't fools. Colonel Bigbee is as dead as Julius Caesar, by this time. We can't do any more than we have done. We've saved the most of the stock; and that's what we're arter. You shet up your head, or you'll find that ef we don't want to fight more of the reds, we kin lay out any Yank that ever stepped."

Sol listened silently, and then said:

"All right, major, if ye don't want to go. I didn't mean no disrespect to nobody here: but I'm goin' over that river, arter the cunnel's body. If ye don't want to foller me, ye can stay behind, and tell the folks at the ranch that I promised 'em I'd bring back the cunnel, and I'm the man from New Hampshire that never gives in on a question of manners. 'Twouldn't be good manners to let the reds have the cunnel's body, to cut up their shines over him. I'm told they burn folks alive, and dance round 'em, to hear 'em holler. That

ain't the way I was brought up. If ye don't want'er go, good-night."

So saying, he was turning his horses' heads to the river to ride in, when Pistol Jim suddenly shouted:

"No man shall say I let a Yank go where I didn't dar' go. I'm with Solid Sol!"

Sol smiled and looked round, asking:

"Ain't there no one else wants to go with us?"

Gray Pepper said nothing, but rode up, beside Pistol Jim, and was followed by Curley Pink and the Thomson brothers, when Rhett called out, in a tone that showed he began to see they were in earnest:

"Boys, this is foolhardiness, and you can't do any good by it. That Yank's as mad as a bull in fly-time, and he ain't fit to be follered. Any man that goes with him will have to take care of himself; for I sha'n't let help go after them."

Solid Sol curled his lip, as he answered:

"We're not askin' for help, Major Rhett. We're going to do somethin' you *dare* n't do; and that's all you want to know. Good-night to ye."

And with that, he rode into the river, followed by the five men who had ridden up beside him, while the Indians on the other bank ceased their yells, as if amazed at the spectacle of such boldness, and apparently suspecting a trap.

But Rhett, seeing that most of the stock had been recovered by this time, and was already beginning to move on the homeward trail, with the instinct of animals to return to their usual place, called to his men and rode off, leaving the little band in the river to the fate it seemed to be rushing on so madly.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE LADIES SAID ABOUT IT.

THE ladies at Mesquite Ranch had been sitting up, unable to sleep for anxiety and fear, after the sudden disturbance and the departure of all the men available for defense. The ranch-house was still ablaze with lights, and the uneasy women were flitting from place to place, trying to comfort each other and inspire courage in face of the peril that had so suddenly come on them.

It was the first time such a raid had come that way, though they were familiar with the records of similar events in other parts of the State. They were not far from the Rio Grande border; but had hitherto enjoyed immunity from the dashes of the Indians, in consequence of the proximity of a fort, which was generally occupied by United States troops. How the Indians had managed to escape the vigilance of those troops, and why the people of the ranch had as yet seen no trace of a soldier going in pursuit, was the problem to all the ladies, and Clara Nunez was especially severe on the troops as she said to Bessie Bell:

"I think it is perfectly outrageous. Those Yankee soldiers are no good at all. What are they here for, if not to protect us? Yet they have let these Indians come and steal all our stock, and, for all they cared, we might have been murdered and carried off. What sort of a Government is it, that cannot protect its own citizens?"

And the other Southern ladies, as bitter as herself, chimed in with the abuse of the "Yankee troops," as being useless and cowardly, and everything else that was bad; while Bessie Bell, who came from the State of Pennsylvania, and was only there on a visit to her cousin, Colonel Bigbee, sat in a corner, weeping softly, and unable to say a word in defense of her own section.

The departure of Sol had produced a momentary excitement among them and a spasm of hope; but as the hours went and he did not return, while quiet had spread over the prairie, sleep began to overcome the watchers, though they did not dare to go to bed, but slept where they were, in chairs, and on sofas and couches, till the early streaks of dawn shone in on them, and the house was roused by the shouts of the negroes at the stables, who came hurrying to the mansion to tell the ladies that the men were returning. The news brought everybody out on the piazza, and they saw that the negroes spoke the truth, for they could hear the bellowing of the herds being driven back to their pastures, and saw some horsemen coming at a gallop toward the ranch-house to give the news.

Major Rhett was the first to arrive, and as the ladies saw his well-known figure they crowded down the steps, round his horse, to ask what had happened.

Only Bessie Bell stayed behind, for she did not like the major, and there was a sense of dread at her heart as she missed the tall form of her cousin, the colonel, which was not to be seen among the rest of the riders.

She heard the major speaking, in low tones, to the rest of the ladies, and especially to Clara Nunez, to whom she knew him to be engaged, and the intelligence he brought seemed to produce silence and depression in the most of the audience, while apprehensive glances were cast in her own direction, for Bigbee had been her only relative in that part of the coun-

try, and since his departure the poor little Northern girl had been very lonely among a number of Southern women, who seemed to take a pleasure in making her feel that she was not "of them."

At last the group broke up; and Bessie Bell, seeing that the major was riding off without speaking to her, ventured to come forward and make him a timid signal that she wished to speak to him.

The rancher saw the gesture and turned his horse toward her, with an air of suppressed uneasiness that did not escape her. He was a little paler than his wont; and his eyes did not meet hers, as the girl came up beside his horse, and said, in a hesitating way:

"Pardon me, major, but is there any news? Where is Colonel Bigbee? He went with you. Has anything happened to him?"

"I trust not, sincerely," he answered, evasively; "but the fact is, Miss Bell, that the colonel got separated from our party, and has been missing for part of the night. We do not anticipate any harm; but he will not be in for some time—if at all."

"If at all!" she echoed. "Good heavens, sir! do you mean that he has been taken by the savages?"

Rhett twitched his lips and did not seem in a hurry to answer, till she repeated the question impatiently.

Then he said, with a shake of the head, as if determined to tell the worst, regardless of consequences:

"Well, yes, it is possible. The fact was, he was too rash, and he followed some of his stock into the midst of the Indians, after they had got over the river. It is possible that they may have taken him prisoner, and that he will have to pay a ransom to get out. You know that the Indians on the other side of the border are different from those on this side. They do not kill their prisoners without mercy but frequently keep them for ransom, being able to treat with our people through the Mexican Government."

Bessie Bell came a step nearer to ask:

"Did you see him taken?"

Rhett colored deeply as he replied:

"Well, yes. I may say we did."

"And was not there found, among all you gentlemen, who pride yourselves on your courage, one man bold enough to attempt his rescue?" asked the girl, in a tremulous voice. "Remember, major, that he has been a good friend to all of you, at many a time, when you needed a friend."

Somehow, Rhett's eyes sunk before hers, and he answered sullenly:

"It would have done no good to have gone after him. The troops at the fort are all off on a scout somewhere to the west. We were not strong enough to beat them back, and they would probably have killed him, as soon as they thought there was danger of his recapture. You ladies do not understand these things."

Bessie drew up her slight figure, and flashed a scornful glance at him as she said:

"That may be, but there is one thing we do understand: that you have let your friend and neighbor be killed, and there is none of you who has come back with a wound. We don't do things that way in the North, major."

The Texan flushed scarlet at the rebuke, but made no answer save to wheel his horse and ride off, with a stiff bow to the lady, while the rough cowboys, who were round and heard her speak, looked at each other significantly, till one of them said:

"Please, miss, some of the boys went arter him, with that Yank they call Solid Sol."

The girl faced round on him eagerly.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean, miss, that the Yank and five more of the boys went over the river arter the cunnel, and the last we heard of 'em there was a good deal of shootin'," replied the cowboy, who was none other than Roaring Jack. "The rest of us wanted to go, but the major he 'lowed 'twarn't no use, and it's my belief, miss, that it warn't. It only made more men to be killed, fur no use."

Bessie Bell bowed her head in acknowledgment of the news, and went into the house with a heavy heart. The first person she saw there was Mrs. Garland, the widowed sister of Colonel Bigbee, who had been prostrated from the moment the first news of the raid had come to the house, but who now had risen from her couch and came out like a ghost, in a long white wrapper, to ask Bessie what she had heard outside.

The girl told her, in a few bitter words, how the Texans, as she put it, had "left poor Tom to be killed," and the widow fainted away at once, and had to be carried to her room, where Bessie was installed as nurse, and where she passed the rest of a long and dreary day, thinking over all the kind acts and words that had endeared her cousin to her, though he was much older than herself, and how she would never see him again.

Colonel Tom Bigbee was not the kind of a man, with his grizzled beard and grave ways, to take a young girl's fancy; but Bessie had always looked on him in the light of an indulgent uncle, rather than a cousin; and the notion of having him in the hands of the Indians,

was so terrifying to her, that she could not get it out of her mind. Of the big Yankee, whom she had seen for an instant, the night before, and whom she had recognized as the Hercules, who had thrown the bull in front of the piazza a few weeks ago, she thought but little; but his words were recalled to her forcibly, a little later in the day, when one of the negro house-servants came in, to tell her that there was "a man outside who wished to see her."

She went out and found little Tom Gray or Gray Pepper, by his horse in front of the house, and the little cowboy asked her with a bashful bow:

"Please, miss, be you Miss Bessie Bell?"

She bowed, and he continued:

"Please, miss, I've brought ye a message from Solid Sol. He told me to come hyar and find ye out, and tell ye that he hain't furgot his promise, to bring the cunnel back. He's acrost the river, huntin' him up, and ef the cunnel ain't killed, he'll bring him back. That's all."

And before the girl could question him, Pepper was off again.

CHAPTER XVI.

OVER THE BORDER.

WHEN the daring and apparently foolhardy Yankee rode into the river, directly in front of the Indians, he was not as rash as the cowboys thought him. He had no intention of braving the whole force of the savages, and giving himself up, a helpless prey, into their hands. Sol, as the reader has discovered ere this, was a very sharp fellow, whom none of the Texans understood, and who had seen a good many more things, in the way of warfare, than they dreamed of. The very fact of his being able to ride two horses at once, in the way he did, showed that he was no common countryman, though he had chosen to give that account of himself, when he first visited the ranch, in the character of a tramp.

He rode into the river, followed by the five men who had been shamed into the deed, but who felt heartily sorry they had ever done so, when they saw the Indians on the further bank. But as soon as he came to a place deep enough for his horses to swim, he let the current carry him down, and the Texans followed his example, so that, by the time they reached the other shore, they were some miles below the Indians, who had not thought it worth while to follow them, seeing that they threatened the raiders with no danger.

This he did, because he knew that, in that direction, lay the Mexican village of Santa Maria de Candelero, or "St. Mary of the Candlestick"—a place where he knew that the Indians were in the habit of disposing of much of the proceeds of their raids, after they had crossed the border, and where the Mexicans were in sufficient force to make the Indians civil, when they came into town.

Sol, since he had been in Texas, had learned a good deal about the ways of his Spanish fellow-ranchmen, and talked Spanish well.

When he had landed with his five friends, Pistol Jim said, with an air of relief:

"Well, ef we don't git the cunnel, at least we'll keep aour scalps, and that's more'n I thought we was gwine to do when we fu'st started in hyar."

Sol smiled as he replied:

"You boys that come with me ain't goin' to be sorry ye did it. I know what I'm about as well as the next man, and don't you forget it, Jim. We're a-goin' to see the Alcalde of Candelero, and if we don't git the cunnel back it won't be aour fault. If the Injuns don't have him killed afore we git word to him I'll git him, sure."

"And haow air ye gwine to do that?" asked Jim, curiously.

Sol laughed.

"Thar's a many things you Texans don't know, Jim, and that's one of 'em. We'll git up a circus for 'em ef there ain't no other way to do it; but the cunnel has got to come back to the ranch of he's in the land of the living; and it's my belief he is."

Here Pepper said soberly:

"They won't kill him till they tries a little torture fu'st; and they never does that till they gets to tha'r own place, up in the maountings. I've h'ard say, by them as has b'en among them, that them Chiricahuas lives away off, and no one hain't never b'en to tha'r home. Ef they take the cunnel thar, mebbe we won't never git no chance to git him back."

Sol, who was riding in his curious fashion on the two horses, lying across their backs, now that there was no occasion for speed, here rose to his feet and shook his rein, saying:

"If that's the case, the sooner we git to Candelero the better."

And with that they increased their speed and rode into the little village of Candelero, just as the galloping of horses told them that the Indians, who had seen them crossing afar off, had taken it into their heads to send down a party to investigate the matter.

The cowboys heard them coming and began to grow nervous; but Solid Sol never lost his coolness.

"Let 'em come, boys," he said. "There ain't

more than a dozen of them, and we can handle them if they want to fight. But it's my idee that they want to talk. They know that we ain't on our own stampin'-ground and don't want to fight them, and my idee is that Injuns is the same as other men. If ye treat 'em civil, they'll do the same by you. Here's the village and yonder's the alcalde's house."

As he spoke, he directed his steps toward a house with white walls and a flat roof, round the doorway of which, in the moonlight, spite of the fact that it was near midnight, quite a group of men was gathered smoking.

As the giant figure of the singular Yankee rode up erect in the midst of his two horses the men at the alcalde's doorway rose and stared at the apparition as if they had never seen anything like it before.

Then the alcalde himself, a dried-up little Mexican with a white mustache, came forward to say:

"Good-evening, gentlemen. My house is at your disposal and all that is therein. Will it please you to alight?"

He spoke with a certain nervous tremor in his voice as if he were ill at ease, and the men who were with him kept glancing behind Sol and his party to where a small band of Indians could be seen coming on at full speed, as if in pursuit. Evidently the alcalde did not like the looks of things and feared that the soil of Mexico was about to be disturbed by a free fight between the Indians and the Texans.

Sol saw his uneasiness, and to quiet it said, politely:

"We have heard so much of the generosity of the great Republic of Mexico, which we have helped to save from the clutches of the invading Germans and French, that we have come to pay a visit to Our Lady of the Candlestick and to beg the intercession of the alcalde in our favor."

At this point the Indians, who had been following, entered the limits of the village, and slackened their pace to a walk, while the alcalde said nervously:

"My intercession in what, gentlemen?"

"Between us and your friends, the Chiricahuas. They are subject, I believe, to Mexican laws; and they have been across the border, and have stolen some of our horses, besides taking prisoner one of our friends," said Sol quietly. "We have not come here to fight, unless we are attacked, and I beg you to say as much to your friends, who are coming yonder."

As he spoke, he and his friends drew their pistols and faced round on the Indians, who had now come within shooting distance, while the big man shouted in Spanish:

"You have come near enough. If you wish to talk, send one man and I will meet him."

The Indians heard him, and a low, whispered conversation took place between them for a few moments, at the end of which one called out in a boastful way:

"You are Yanquis, and the best thing you can do is to go back. If you stay here much longer, our young men will make a bonfire for you, and we will dance round it."

The alcalde heard him and his face paled as he said to Sol:

"You would do well to go back. It is true they are nominally in obedience to Mexican laws; but you know what they are, those Indians. They are devils from the other world, and if they begin to fight, we have no troops nearer than Chihuahua. Indeed, gentlemen, the best thing you can do is to go back, over the river."

Sol had kept his eyes on the Indians in front, and saw that, for all their boastful tone, they had not dared to advance, so he cried out once more:

"If you wish to talk, let your chief come forward. We do not talk to men who have never killed a foe. Let the chief come, and I will talk to him."

His resolute bearing had its effect; for one of the Indians rode out of the party, waving his lance, and crying:

"I am Geronimo, chief of the Chiricahuas, who has taken forty white scalps. Let the white chief come, and I will give his flesh to the coyotes to eat."

Sol made a signal to his men to stay behind, and jumped off his horses, striding forward. Then he cried:

"Let the chief come on alone, and I will show him how to fight."

The words were hardly uttered when the Indian chief rode at him with a yell, as he stood there in the moonlight, apparently unarmed, his tall figure drawn up to its full height. The Mexicans uttered a low cry of horror, for they saw he had folded his arms, and had not touched one of the weapons in his belt. The next minute the long lance of Geronimo was seen to pass by his body, as the active giant, with a dexterity that amazed them, leaped to one side.

Then, before they could draw breath, Sol had made a leap in the air as the horse rushed by at speed, trying to turn on him, and with one powerful arm had swept the chief from his saddle, and hurled him on his back in the dust. Before he could recover from the shock, Sol

was on him; had seized the weapons from his belt; thrown them far away; cast the Indian over his knee with the strength of a giant, and was flogging him unmercifully with his own whip, which he had wrenched from his wrist, as if the warrior had been a baby.

"Now," he cried as he flogged away, "will ye show any more such manners to me? Say!" The Texans raised a yell of triumph, and the Indians rushed to save their chief.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PARLEY.

SOL, when he performed his apparently foolhardy feat before the Indians, had realized that it was necessary to overawe them, and that he could depend on his friends, the Texans, to support him. He had not relied on them in vain; for, as soon as the Indians broke up their party, to avenge their chief, the Texans rode up to their man, and sat, with presented pistols, surrounding the struggling Geronimo, whose yells of pain and terror at the unlooked-for catastrophe which had overtaken him, could be heard all over the village.

The same man who would have borne torture at the stake without a murmur, was so astonished and demoralized at the way in which an unarmed man had humiliated him, that he was actually yelling for help, while he was perfectly powerless in the grasp of the giant, who was whipping him.

The Indians were cowed, in their turn, by the resolute attitude of the Texans, whose pistols they had learned to dread; and it so happened that they had no weapons with them but bows and arrows. They had not expected to fight, but to treat; and the sudden struggle had been brought on by the accidental boasting of Geronimo.

The sudden and ignominious defeat that had befallen that famous warrior had demoralized them, the more that it had taken place in sight of the Mexicans, who were laughing at the sight, while the population of the village, attracted by the noise, was beginning to make its appearance at the doors of the houses, with all sorts of arms in hand, expecting an attack.

This, more than anything else, had been the reason for the caution the Indians had displayed in entering the village, for they knew that the men of Candelero, living on the frontier, far from troops, were accustomed to take care of themselves, though not disposed to provoke the Indians.

Therefore the Indians, instead of charging home on the Texans, as they would have done had they found them alone, began to shout for a parley, and to wave white rags as flags of truce.

The giant Yankee, who kept his eyes open all the time he was giving Geronimo his chastisement, saw this, and intermitted his castigation to shout:

"Let all those Indians go back and I will talk to the chief."

He had found Geronimo an insignificant antagonist as far as strength was concerned, though the chief was active as a cat, and well-skilled in the use of weapons. Indeed, Geronimo was completely subdued by the way in which he had been handled, and when Sol at last released him he did not attempt to escape, but lay on the ground, where he had been dropped at Sol's feet, staring up at him as if the Yankee giant had been a being from the other world.

The Indians, seeing the Mexicans coming out in numbers, obeyed the order to scatter, and retired to a safe distance, while the alcalde, seeing the turn affairs had taken, came forward to the scene of the late conflict, surrounded by a guard of armed men, and said in a tone of importance:

"What is all this trouble about? You Texan gentlemen must not forget that you are on the soil of Mexico, and that you must not violate the peace of the Republic."

Sol set his foot on the neck of the prostrate Geronimo as he answered boldly:

"Just now, you told me that the Republic could not control these Indians. Now we are taking care of ourselves. I have taken this chief fairly, and I intend to hold him till our friend is given up by his men. The Indians crossed our border first."

Here the alcalde puffed out his chest, and answered:

"That is no excuse for you, however. You have crossed our border; and are liable to be made prisoners in the name of the Republic of Mexico. These Indians are our allies, and you have no business to fight them on our soil."

As he spoke, he made a signal to his men, who, to the number of more than fifty, began to surround the little knot of Texans, with guns in their hands. Sol, seeing that he was likely to get into a worse scrape, if he remained where he was, owing to the new course adopted by the Mexican magistrate, suddenly changed his tone.

"See here, alcalde," he said quietly. "I have a proposition to make to you, which will end all this trouble."

"What is it?" asked the alcalde.

"It is this," said Sol boldly. "Give me leave

to send away one of my men, with a message to the other side of the river, to my friends, to tell them where we are; and then I will treat with these Indians for the ransom of the man who has been taken by them. Your good offices shall be employed for the negotiations; and as the gentleman who has been taken is a rich man, you will not lose by it."

The eyes of the little Mexican sparkled with avarice at the offer, as Sol had expected, and he said at once:

"That is different, of course. The great Republic of Mexico is magnanimous, and always ready to offer its good offices. Send the chief to the Indians, with the proposition, and they will hear it, I make no doubt. If they hear that the Alcalde of Candelero wishes to see them, I will venture to say that they will tremble at my name."

"That is all right," answered Sol quietly, "but for one thing. The chief is my prisoner. I took him, bare-handed, and he is mine. I will not trust him among them, for he might run away. Let me send a good messenger away, as I said, and the rest I will attend to."

Then taking his foot from the neck of the prostrate Indian, he said, in the tone of one addressing a dog:

"Get up!"

Geronimo rose slowly, as if dazed, and drew a long breath, while the Mexicans stared at him amazedly; for he had been dreaded by all of them, for his relentless cruelty and daring. Now he seemed to be completely subdued, for the time being.

Solid Sol laid his grip on the Indian's shoulder, and pointed to the distant group of his comrades.

"Call me a messenger," he said briefly.

Geronimo not seeming to understand, he repeated the order; and the chief raised a long quivering cry, at the sound of which, one of the distant Indians came galloping up.

When the savage checked his horse in front of his chief, he stared at Geronimo, as if he could hardly believe his eyes, while Sol, in the same imperious tone, continued:

"Tell that man to go and bring back here the prisoner that fell into your hands, this evening. Tell him that, as the Indians treat him, so I will treat you; and that all the Indians in Mexico cannot save you from my grip. Do you hear?"

Geronimo bowed, and spoke to the Indian.

"Go to the band, and tell them that the American prisoner must be brought here, or I shall suffer whatever is in store for him."

The Indian hesitated, and said something in his own tongue, which caused the Yankee giant to say sharply:

"Speak Spanish. If you attempt to deceive me, it will be the worse for you. Remember, this is your chief, and that you cannot save him."

Geronimo earnestly nodded, and said:

"Tell them that I am a captive; and that, if they hope to see me again, they must not kill the American chief, yet."

The messenger bowed his head, and Sol pointed to the distant band of savages, who were between him and the river.

"Tell those men," he said, "that if they do not get from between us and the water, we shall kill the chief at once."

His words produced a visible disturbance in Geronimo, and the chief gave a peremptory order to the messenger, to repeat the words of the American to his friends. He was evidently completely cowed by the position in which he had been placed; and his earnest air so impressed the messenger that he set off at speed; and within ten minutes after, Sol saw the Indians drawing off from between him and the river, to the evident relief of the alcalde, who, in spite of his boasting and the number of men with them, seemed to be puzzled and impressed by the calm and confident bearing of the Texans.

As soon as the way was clear, Sol said to Pepper:

"Now, Tom, I want a man as ain't afeard of nobody, to ride for the Mesquite Ranch, and find Miss Bessie Bell, who's there. She's a cousin of the cunnel's, and I promised I'd bring back the cunnel, dead or alive. The poor lady is skeered, nigh to death, by this time. Tell her that I'm here; and that I'm hunting for the cunnel, and that I'll get him back, if he's above ground. That's all, jest to give her a little comfort. Don't tell her nothen else; but ride back here, if the road's open. I'll want all the good boys I kin get, afore we git through this rumpus."

Pepper nodded his understanding.

"Ay, ay, that's the little gal comes from the North. I'll tell her, and come back here. But what if you're gone, when I come back?"

"I'll leave word fur ye, Tommy," said Sol, calmly; "unless we're all wiped out by that time. All you've got to do is to take that message."

Then, as Pepper set spurs to his horse and flew away, he said to Pistol Jim, in an undertone:

"There's rough work ahead of us, Jim; and Pepper ain't heavy enough for it. If you boys stick to me, we'll pull through yet."

"When I come over the river with ye, I expected to stick," said Jim, dryly. "I might have staid behind, ye know, Sol."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INDIAN'S OFFER.

THE Mexicans, whether it was that they thought the Texans were in their power, or that their avarice had been roused by the words that had passed respecting a ransom, made no effort to stop Pepper as he rode away; and did not offer to molest Sol and his four friends, who sat round him and his captive, with cocked pistols, as if ready to sell their lives dearly.

Solid Sol, as soon as he saw that Pepper was fairly on his way to the river, and out of danger, turned to Geronimo, who had been by his side all the time—not daring to stir for the heavy hand on his shoulder—and ordered curtly:

"Come with me."

Then he stalked up to the alcalde, and said politely:

"We are in your charge, alcalde; but so is the chief here, who is my prisoner. If you wish to see any of the ransom that we are to offer for our friend, this man must be kept safe. If he gets away, we shall be cheated as well as you. Will you let us take him to your house? We are willing to pay for our accommodation."

The alcalde seemed to be relieved at the request, for he had been revolving in his mind what he should do, if these terrible Texans, who seemed afraid of nothing, should take it into their heads to make a dash for the river and get off with their prisoner. His own men, he knew, could not be relied on, with their clumsy Mexican blunderbusses, to follow the Texans with their rifles and revolvers. Once in the house, and without their horses, the power of flight would be taken from them, and he instantly bowed and expressed his pleasure at the prospect of entertaining "such distinguished cavaliers, who had already shown such valor."

Then the Mexicans, at a sign from the alcalde, dispersed to their homes; and the Texans went to the house where they had first seen the alcalde and his friends. The apparent mystery of their being up and around the doorway at such a late hour, was solved, the moment they entered the doorway, by the sight of a table covered with cards, at which the alcalde and his guests had been playing, when the sound of the galloping horses disturbed them. The fact was that the alcalde kept a gambling-house; and his patrons rarely went home till daylight, especially on moonlight nights.

The eyes of the cowboys glinted at sight of the cards, for they were all enthusiastic gamblers; and the alcalde, not to be impolite, invited them to join in a little game, at which the Indian chief, Geronimo, was soon assisting, with an eagerness that showed him, too, to be an old gambler.

Sol was the only person in the room who did not play, and he was glad to see the way in which every one else soon became absorbed in the game, as it gave him time to collect his thoughts, and made the escape of Geronimo less likely. He had heard that Indians are desperate gamblers; and Geronimo, in watching the turn of a card, seemed to have forgotten all about the condition he was in.

The giant stood by the door, watching the interior and exterior alternately, the gamblers inside becoming more and more absorbed in their game, till the rays of dawn began to steal in over the prairie, when Sol heard the gallop of horses, and looking up, perceived three Indians, coming toward the house of the alcalde, as fast as they could whip their ponies.

He gave the signal to his friends, who left their game in an instant, much to the disgust of the Mexicans and Geronimo, who seemed to be perfectly infatuated with the turn of the cards.

But there was no time to be lost; and when the three Indians drew up at the door of the house, the Yankee giant perceived, at a glance, that they were chiefs of rank, from the splendor of their dress, according to Indian notions, and the eagle-feathers in their hair.

One of them was an old Indian, who bore a striking likeness to Geronimo, and who announced himself as "Geronimo" also, the father of the young chief who had been overthrown by Sol.

The old chief had come to find out whether it was true that his son had been disgraced before the Mexicans, by being whipped by a man who had disdained to use his weapons on him.

Sol noticed that the young chief, at the sight of his father, whose scarred face and naked body showed him to be an old warrior, evinced great shame, and slunk behind the door-post, as if unwilling to be seen by any one.

Sol himself answered the question, by dragging the young man out before his father, and telling the chief that, "just what the Indians did to Colonel Bigbee, he would do to the chief's son."

Old Geronimo showed no emotion at the news, though it cut him in a tender spot; but asked at once "what the American proposed."

Now was the time for Sol to see if the Mexi-

can's interference was of any avail, and he called to the alcalde, who came forward, swelling with importance.

"Alcalde," he said, "tell the chief that we are willing to give a fair ransom for our friend. We have taken the chief's son, and can do what we like with him. Let him give us our friend, for his son, and we will call it a fair exchange."

But the alcalde, who saw no money in this, at once objected.

"What is an Indian to a rich owner of cattle?" he said. "One such is worth a dozen Indians. My judgment is that the Americans should give a hundred head of cattle, and as many horses, for their friend, if they wish him back. The Indians can take half of these, and the rest is my fee for my judgment."

Old Geronimo said nothing, but sat on his horse, his dark eyes rolling from one to the other; and Sol said:

"That is absurd. The chief's son is no common Indian. If the chief had a daughter to marry he would ask a hundred ponies for her, at the very least. Let us set the one against the other and call it an even exchange."

Then to the alcalde he said in a whisper:

"You shall have your horses, but you are not going the right way to get them."

Geronimo listened, and when he saw the men converse apart he said in his deep musical voice:

"The man you have there is no chief. He is not worth two ponies. He is no son of mine, but a coward who has taken my son's name. We want none of him in the tribe. Let him die. As for the white prisoner, he is a man, who has killed three of our men before he could be taken, and our people have resolved that he shall be taken to our home in the mountains and done to death. I have spoken."

Sol looked at the alcalde as the chief spoke, and the face of the Mexican was full of shrewd significance as he whispered:

"He is bargaining. He is ashamed of his son, but he loves him, after all."

Sol caught the idea, and at once stepped back into the doorway and dragged out the young chief once more.

"Behold!" he said to old Geronimo; "you say this man is not your son. Then you will laugh if you see me kill him. I will flog him to death before your eyes, and you shall look on!"

So saying, he threw the trembling young savage before him again and whirled aloft the heavy Indian whip he had taken from him.

All the while the giant was watching the old chief keenly and saw him quail at the sight of his son's evident fear and agony.

Still old Geronimo did not yield, till the lash fell with a sound that echoed among the houses like a pistol-shot. The crack was followed by a stream of blood from the young savage and a shriek of pain, at which the old man broke down and cried:

"Hold! I will buy him of you, though he be not my son. I will give fifty ponies to save him from the lash."

Sol, with his tremendous grip on the shoulder of the writhing young savage, eyed the father sternly.

"I will take no ponies for him," he said. "I will take the white man or nothing. If you think you can save your son, I will fight you as I did him; and if you kill me I will give him to you."

The old chief eagerly shouted:

"It is a bargain. Let the boy go. He is tender and young and I am an old fighter. If you can get the best of old Geronimo, you are worthy to be a chief in our tribe."

Sol beckoned to his friends and handed over the young chief to them, saying:

"Guard him well, if he tries to escape. Use whips alone. The old man wants him to be shot; but I have determined to whip him to death, instead. He seems afraid of that."

Then he stepped out before the old chief and said, as he stretched his powerful arms:

"Tell your men to get back. As for you, you can use your lance and club. I will use nothing but my hands; and if you are beaten, the white prisoner is mine."

Old Geronimo bowed his head gravely.

"If you can beat me, with bare hands, you are the best man that ever crossed the river," he said, sententiously.

Then he drew from his belt, with a scrupulous fairness that the Yankee giant could not help admiring, a pair of pistols, and threw them on the ground beside his bow and quiver.

He said something to the Indians who had come with him that sent them off at a gallop, and then wheeled his own horse and executed a profound salute with his long lance, after which he galloped off to a distance to get room to charge and came thundering down at Solid Sol, who stood in the dusty road in front of the alcalde's house, waiting for him with folded arms.

His attitude was assumed in imitation of an old bull-fighter whom he had once seen on the ranch, describing a scene that he, the aforesaid bull-fighter, had witnessed at Madrid, in the arena. This bull-fighter, having grown old and stiff, had been obliged to come down to the post of killer at a ranch, where his blow was deliv-

ered without danger; but he was very fond of telling stories of how, in former days, he had been able to dodge the charge of the fiercest bulls, without even a cloak to aid him, standing directly in front of the fierce animal and trusting to his agility to save his life in an instant of time.

Sol had noted, at the time, the attitude of the old man; knees near together, feet far apart, toes turned in, while his folded arms were belied by the watchful glare of his eye, as he stood ready to leap to either side the moment the bull closed its eyes.

In the same attitude he now stood himself, eying the old chief as he came on, the keen lance-point glittering in the light of the just rising sun.

Sol had taken care to get this light at his back and in the face of the old chief, for he wanted all the chances in his favor in such a terrible trial of skill.

Down came old Geronimo, and the lance-point was close to the giant's breast, when Sol skipped to one side, just as he had seen the old bull-fighter do, in describing the feat.

But old Geronimo was a better warrior than his son, and though he missed his point, Sol could not succeed in throwing him from his pony, as he had the vaunting young man of the previous night. The chief swerved away from him, horse and all; and the giant was baffled in his spring. Geronimo wheeled round at a little distance, and rode at him again, the thrust of the lance, this time, coming so close as to tear the Yankee's loose jacket.

In a moment Sol had whirled round, the tough velvet-lined engaging the lance, had caught the shaft under his arm, and was hauling the old chief out of his saddle by main force.

Indeed, had not Geronimo let go of his lance, he would have been a prisoner in another moment; and, as it was, Sol managed to lay his hand on the pony's tail and give the animal a jerk to one side that nearly threw it to the ground.

But the lance impeded his motions, and before he could throw it off Geronimo had escaped and had picked up a heavy war-club, with a steel spike in the end, which he brandished in the air as he rushed down on the giant, shouting:

"This is old Geronimo, and no boy you are fighting."

Now, indeed, Sol had all he could do to take care of himself, fettered as he was by the promise to fight with bare hands. For a moment, he thought of using the lance he had just captured, but as soon as he turned toward it the Mexicans set up a shout of derision, just as if they had been witnessing a bull-fight and had caught the matador at a cowardly trick. Then he ground his teeth and ran straight at the old chief, defying the war-club.

Up it rose in the air, and Geronimo made a furious sweep at his head. Sol saw it coming and dodged it with a stoop of his body, rushing in to close the moment he stooped, and trying to get inside his enemy's guard.

But he had met a wary old warrior on a trained pony, and the animal, as if it realized what a foe its master was fighting, gave a whirl and dashed away, lashing out with its heels.

The Mexicans laughed again, and shouted:

"Bravo, Geronimo!"

It was all fun to them.

Sol, seeing that it was likely to be a long fight, and that it would never do to exhaust himself, stopped the moment he heard the laugh, and eyed his antagonist with the same wary watchfulness he had shown at the beginning of the fight.

The second time Geronimo came down, it was with a rush, for a straight down-cut, and the Yankee giant stood in the middle of the road, as before, with folded arms, eying his foe sternly.

This time he feigned; pretending he was going to leap to one side away from the club, while he really leaped to the other.

Down came the club; and so close was the shave, this time, that he actually caught the weapon as it completed its sweep; and before the old chief could recover his balance, had torn it from his hand and dealt the pony a slash with the steel blade at the side, which laid open its haunch and brought it to a halt, holding up one leg, disabled.

Then Sol, throwing away the club, bounded on the animal, and gave a clutch at the old chief.

He almost caught him; but Geronimo slipped off at the other side, and in another moment had plucked his knife out of his belt, and cast it straight at the broad breast of the Yankee giant.

Sol saw it coming, and dodged, but a second too late. The knife struck him, but glanced as he wheeled round, tearing his shirt and giving a slash to his side; but inflicting no deep wound.

The next moment the giant was chasing Geronimo, on foot, regardless of the fact that the fleet-footed old savage was leading him away from the village, and ran him down at last, within a hundred yards of the village limit.

The chief had nothing left but his whip, and this Sol snatched from him: caught him by the long hair, and jerked him to his knees,

with a strength that was increased by his irritation at the wily tricks of the red desperado.

He forced the old chief over on his hands and knees, and, dragging him along by the hair, began to flog him, just as he had done his son, when old Geronimo uttered a wild cry; and the next moment Sol heard the rapid gallop of horses.

Suspecting a trick, and determined that the Indian should not get the best of it, he turned to the village, dimly sensible that a number of savages were coming down at a gallop to the help of the chief, and that the Mexicans were running out to the edge of the village.

With a fierce energy that forgot all the torture he was inflicting, he dragged the old chief after him by the hair of the head; Geronimo yelling all the way; and ran into the village at last, to find his friends out with their pistols, while the Mexicans were clapping their hands and wildly cheering him, as he rushed in, with cries of:

"Bravo, Yanqui! Bravo, Tejano!"

They had had all the fun they wanted for one while at last. Such a bull-fight had never been seen in Mexico.

As for Sol, he was so incensed at the treachery of the old chief, in calling for help, that he was about to lash him as severely as he had the young one, when he was apprised, by warning shouts, that he had best look to himself.

Clutching Geronimo's hair, like a vise, he turned, to see at least a hundred Indians, sweeping down on the village, yelling and raising a cloud of dust, while the Mexicans were fleeing to their houses.

To drag old Geronimo after him to the alcalde's doorway, and rush in, was the work of a few seconds; and then he hastily flung to and barred the door, finding that his Texan friends were already inside.

What had become of the Mexicans he did not at first know; but Pistol Jim informed him.

"I knowed there warn't no truth in a Greaser," he panted, savagely. "The darned galoots have jined the reds, and we're in a trap."

Sol's only answer was to drag the now nearly insensible old chief after him to the staircase; and his friends followed.

They knew where he was going well enough—to the flat roof or *azotea* of the house, whence he could have a full view of the village, and where he would be protected, by the low, mud battlement, from an attack from below, in case the Indians fired up.

In a few moments they were on the *azotea*, and found the village full of mounted Indians, riding to and fro, and yelping; while the Mexicans had vanished from view.

Presently, Pistol Jim's words were belied, by the tops of the houses in the neighborhood becoming covered with Mexicans, who opened a heavy fire from their clumsy brass blunderbusses on the Indians in the streets below, causing them to scamper off faster than they had come, leaving the Texans masters of the situation, for awhile.

Young Geronimo had made his escape in some way; and Sol asked angrily how it came about.

Pistol Jim excused himself by telling how he had seen the Indians coming down to kill Sol; and they had seen at once that his life was better worth saving than that of young Geronimo.

"We've made a change, Sol," he said. "We've got the old man for the young one; and he's worth a heap more, as you'll soon see. I've been among the red cusses before, and old Geronimo is their head chief. They won't let him go, and we'll git back the cunnel yet. You see if we don't."

"I'll see he don't escape," was the grim remark of the Yankee giant, as he went up to the old chief, and bound him securely with a lariat, of which there were plenty lying about in the alcalde's house. He tied the leathern thongs so tight that the old man lay as helpless as a trussed fowl, and then the five friends sat down on the roof of the house, and surveyed the situation round them. For awhile there seemed to be a lull in hostilities.

CHAPTER XIX.

FATHER AND SON.

THE lull lasted only for a short while; and then Pistol Jim, who was watching the distant Indians, pointed toward them and said:

"Told ye so. That's the young cuss, coming back to look for the old one. Now, ef we keep a stiff upper lip, we'll have the cunnel back yet."

Sol looked in the direction indicated, and saw the figure of the young chief, now tricked out in all the bravery of savage finery, as he urged his pony at its utmost speed toward the village, and then brought it on its haunches under the walls of the alcalde's house, with a grace and ease that showed him to be a perfect horseman, expert in war.

No one, to look at his bright figure, would have thought him the same man who had been

so ignominiously defeated, the night before, and who had cowered like a child under the lash of Solid Sol.

He waved his hand to the men on the battlement and called out in Spanish:

"We want to talk."

"Talk freely," answered Sol, looking over the mud wall. "What do you want to say?"

He watched Geronimo keenly, and saw that the young chief, with all his bravado, had an uneasy air when he heard the voice of the giant, who had treated him as an infant the night before. But Geronimo kept up his courage and answered:

"We have a captive of your nation, whom we are going to burn alive under the walls of this village, if you do not give us up our chief, whom you have trapped by bad medicine."

Sol looked over the wall and eyed the young Indian keenly.

"If you want your father back," he said, "and are willing to come in and take his place, I will talk to you. He and you are a pair of cowards, who have tried to cheat me. If you do not go away, I will come down and take you off your horse again."

The instant the young chief heard the threat, he backed and wheeled his horse, while he shook his fist defiantly at Sol.

"Come down, dog of a Yanqui," he shouted, "and I will show you that I am a warrior. You have taken an old man; but me you cannot take, as you did last night. Come down, if you dare."

Sol noticed that he had his right hand hidden under his blanket and suspected that he had a pistol concealed therein. He turned to Pistol Jim, and mentioned his suspicion. Jim nodded.

"That's jest what the cuss wants to git a chance at. He's dyin' to git squar' with you for hidin' him, afore all his men. It's a game of bluff. Don't go down. I'll fix him. Tell him ye don't want fight, boys; but ye'll send one of the children down, ef he's anxious for a fight. I'll fix the darned galoot."

Thus urged, Sol called out:

"You are not Geronimo at all. I have whipped Geronimo, and you are only a boy, who has not taken a scalp. I will send down one of the children to fight you."

The young chief below was watching him as he spoke; and, the moment he finished, came a flash from under the blanket, and a bullet whistled close to Sol's head. Geronimo, the younger, had fired a snap-shot; and it had missed.

Before he could repeat it, or run, came a second flash from Pistol Jim, and the Indian chief's pony dropped like a stone, shot through the brain.

The rider instinctively threw himself behind the body of the animal for shelter, and Pistol Jim looked round to Sol, blowing the smoke from his weapon and asking:

"Think I'd best fix him, or shall we go down and git him up?"

Sol started to the staircase in a moment, saying hurriedly:

"Keep him covered, and shoot him if he stirs. I'll go and bring him in, if he don't run. He's better alive than dead, for us."

"You're right there, pard," said Pistol Jim sentimentally, and with that Sol darted downstairs to the doorway.

He unbarred the leaf and threw it back; hearing, as he did so, the echo of a shot from the top of the house. As he ran out, there was young Geronimo, running as hard as he could, a stream of blood marking the ground as he went along, holding in his left hand his right wrist, from which the stream was dropping. Sol was about to pursue him, when Pistol Jim yelled a warning; and the giant saw that the whole force of Indians was coming down in a second charge on the village, set on saving their chief. Therefore he darted back and shut the door again, getting to the *azotea* in time to be greeted by a shower of bullets, as the infuriated Chiricahuas fired at the battlements as fast as they could send the shots, but with indifferent aim, in their excitement.

This time the Mexicans did not come out as they had before, and the Indians had everything their own way for about five minutes, during which they came as close as they dared to the house occupied by the Texans; but kept just out of reach of their pistols. Jim, who was the best marksman of the party, and who had a rifle with him, fired an occasional shot, to bring down a pony and inspire respect; but the Texans did not attempt to show themselves and provoke a close contest. They were glad to know that, as long as they held the old chief, they had the whip-hand of the Indians; and this soon proved to be the case; for the Chiricahuas drew off, after an ineffectual fusillade, and could be seen clustered in groups round the village, as if consulting on what should be done.

Pistol Jim told Sol that he thought they would soon have another effort at a parley and exchange; and his prophecy was realized by the advance of five Indians on horseback, one of them bearing a white flag.

They were allowed to come under the walls, the Texans keeping them covered with their

rifles and pistols, in case of treachery, while Sol demanded what was their business.

The head man of the party announced himself as "Carlos, chief of the Jicarillas, allies of the Chiricahuas, come to demand the release of the old chief, Geronimo."

"You can have him, when you give us up our friend, the white chief, whom you captured last night," said Sol.

Carlos answered that the white chief "had been taken in battle, and that the tribe would not consent to release him. He was doomed to the torture." He further came to say that "if the white men did any harm to Geronimo, the Indians would besiege them, and not one should escape. If the white men would release Geronimo, and pay a thousand head of cattle for their friend, the Indians would give him up; but not otherwise."

Sol told them, in reply, that they were fools, for the white troops could not be far off by this time, and that they were certain to be punished at last.

Carlos laughed at that, and retorted that the white troops were off on a distant scout, and would not be back for a week at least.

"We are not babes in war," he concluded; "and we did not cross the border before we ascertained that the guards were away. We are now inside the territory of Mexico, and your troops dare not cross the line to follow us."

This was bad news for the Texans, who had been wondering, all the time, what had become of the soldiers and counting on their return as an element of strength on their side.

Sol ruminated for a moment, and then renewed his offer of trading Geronimo for the white chief.

Carlos firmly refused, and added:

"The young Geronimo is worth more than the old one; and we are not willing to give a good warrior for an old man."

When the Yankee giant heard that and looked round at his friends he saw that they looked puzzled and cast down. Even Pistol Jim, who had been the firmest of the lot, looked gloomy and said:

"It's a trick of the young feller to git even with the old one for denying him. He knows that he'll be chief with the old man out of the way. I don't know what to do."

Sol asked the Thomson brothers if they had any advice to offer, and they gloomily replied that they had not. Then he turned to Curley Pink, who had been the quietest of the party, and asked him:

"What do you think of it, Curley? Can we get the cunnel back?"

The quiet, gentlemanly Curley pulled thoughtfully at his beard.

"I think," he said, slowly, "that there's only one thing to be tried that we haven't yet tried. Bring out the old chief so that they can see him, and tell them that if the colonel is not brought here they shall see the old man hung over the battlements."

Sol nodded with compressed lips.

"It's a rough thing to do, Curley; for I didn't want to hurt the old man, but the cunnel must be brought back. We kin only try it."

So saying, he went to the middle of the flat roof where the old chief lay, bound hand and foot, and dragged him to the edge of the battlements.

He set him on his feet, so that the Indians below could see him, and threw the noose of a lariat round his neck. The Indians watched the proceeding in silence, and when he had showed them the old man, he called out:

"We have had enough of talk about this. Here is the head chief of the Chiricahuas with a rope round his neck. If the white chief is not brought here in the time you take to ride to your friends and return I will hang your chief over the battlements, and you can do what you like afterward."

The words were greeted with a groan from the Indians below, showing that they were not so careless as they had said, and the old chief himself shrieked:

"Will you desert Geronimo, who has led you to victory so often? Send the white chief here at once!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE HOSTAGE.

THE frantic appeal of the old chief did not fall on deaf ears, and Carlos shouted back:

"We will do it! we will do it! It was young Geronimo who made us say what we did."

"The boy is a coward, and no son of mine!" yelled the old man. "He has brought us all into this trouble. Let the white chief be sent here. Am I not worth all the white men that we ever had captive? Let him be sent for at once and released. Tell them that I command it, and who shall dispute the word of Geronimo?"

Captive as he was, it was impossible to avoid a certain respect for the intense pride with which the old chief spoke, and Carlos at once wheeled his pony and galloped off, followed by his friends, while the old man stood gazing after them sadly.

That the words of Carlos had affected him deeply became evident a little later when he said to Sol:

"White chief, you are a man. I was a man once. May the Great Spirit be good to you when you are as old as I am, and not send you a son who is willing to sell his father to save himself. I should not be here, as you know, but for him."

Sol patted the old chief on the shoulder, kindly enough.

"Don't be down-hearted, chief," he said. "Rather than let the young man go, I'll offer to change him for you. I don't want to hang you, but I do want to hang him, the ungrateful young scoundrel!"

There was a struggle in the mind of the old Indian between the natural love of a father for his child and the feeling that he had been treated with ingratitude. His dark face worked, and then he said slowly:

"Let the old tree die. The young one has years to grow strong and big. The old one is only fit to be burned. See, they do not wish to change yet. Perhaps they are wise."

He pointed to the distant cloud of Indians, where there was a great dust rising, showing that the warriors were riding to and fro, as if excited; and when at last, horsemen were seen detaching themselves from the rest of the Indians, the form of the white prisoner was not among them. Only Carlos was coming back, with several of his friends, while young Geronimo, with his arm in a sling, was riding at a little distance in the rear, as if to see and hear what was said.

When the new embassy came under the walls at last, Carlos was the first to speak, as if trying to explain away something, by saying that "the white prisoner was not near by, and they had been obliged to send for him. In the mean time they were willing to give the white men in the house a free passage to the river if they would give up the old chief. The white prisoner could be arranged for after they were safe on the other side."

Sol listened to the Indian, and turned to his friends to ask their advice. Pistol Jim shook his head, but said nothing, while Curley Pink observed, dryly:

"More bluff. You'll have to hang the old man, and I hate to do it. But they don't believe you are in earnest."

Sol hesitated a moment, and then strode over to where the old chief was standing in his bonds.

"Your time has come, Geronimo," he said. "You will have to die if they will not save you."

The old chief bowed his head gravely. All the terror and demoralization he had shown when being dragged by the hair of his head had disappeared, and he said, quietly:

"A man can die but once. Will you shoot me?"

Sol shook his head.

"No; you will be hung."

Old Geronimo shuddered. Indian-like, he dreaded the form of death more than the fact.

"Hearken, white man," he said, pleadingly. "I am old, and it is no glory to kill an old man like me. In the hunting-grounds of the next world I cannot hurt you or your friends. Why should you tie my soul to a rotting corpse, so that it can never escape? Shoot me dead. Burn me to death, and I will laugh at you. But do not let me die the death of a dog."

Sol hardly understood what the old man meant; but Pistol Jim, who was standing by, enlightened him, by saying:

"That's what skeers the reds more'n anythin' else. They b'lieve that a man who's hanged can't never go to the happy hunting-ground, but has to stay by his corpse till it rots away, 'cause the soul gits aout of the maouth, and the hangin' chokes it down. I'm thinkin' the reds won't let ye hang the old man, though they'd let ye shoot him, and never wink an eye over it, so long as they got the cunnel to burn."

Sol listened, and then said to the old chief, who was waiting, in anxious mood, for his determination:

"Either your friends give me back my friend whom you took last night, or you are hung over the battlements, so that all can see you. That is your fate, and nothing can change it."

Old Geronimo looked him in the eye; saw that he meant what he said, and would do it. Then the courage of the old chief, which had sustained him so far, gave way, and he said, in a whining tone:

"Let me speak to my people. They will not give me up to a fate like that, I am sure."

Sol, by no means unwilling to prolong the parley, knowing that every moment gained was an additional chance in his favor, if the troops heard of the capture of Bigbee, or if the cowboys of the county gathered pluck enough to come over the river in force, nodded.

"Come along and speak to them in Spanish," he said. "Remember that the first word of any other tongue you use, I shall swing you over the battlements without mercy."

Then he led the captive chief, a second time, to the edge of the battlements, and called out:

"I am going to hang your chief. Take your last look at him."

And he showed them old Geronimo, standing with his hands pinioned behind him, and the noose of the lariat round his neck.

The sight was greeted with a groan of terror, which showed that the old chief had not yet lost his hold on the affections of his followers, and Carlos shouted earnestly:

"Do not hang him. Give us time to bring the prisoner."

Old Geronimo lifted his hand for silence; and the savages below ceased calling, and stared at him, as if expecting him to address them and tell them what to do. He called out:

"Is the white prisoner here?"

"He is *not*!" cried Carlos earnestly; but Sol saw that he hesitated a moment in answering, and was convinced that he was lying.

"Then, when he comes, he will be too late," shouted the giant. "Over with the chief!"

He made a signal to his friends, and they took hold of the rope, while the Yankee Hercules took the old chief in his arms, and prepared to toss him over.

Then they heard a wild yell in the distance, where young Geronimo was sitting on his horse, watching; and the young chief dashed up at full speed, shrieking:

"Do not hang him! We will bring the prisoner!"

"Bring him at once, then, and no more cheating about it!" roared the thoroughly-incensed Sol, shaking his fist. "If he is not here in a minute more, over goes the chief."

The Indians at last seemed to be convinced that he meant what he said, and all dashed away at the top of their speed, waving their hands to their friends. Five minutes later, the Texans saw the well-known figure of Colonel Bigbee, with his hands tied behind him, being brought forward on a pony; his feet fastened under the belly of the animal. They had gained their point.

Sol was so delighted that he executed a waltz on the roof of the house; but was recalled to his senses by the quiet voice of Curley Pink, who said, in a low tone:

"We're not out of the woods yet, Sol. Wait till the colonel is inside the house, before you shout."

Then they saw Carlos come toward the house again at full speed; and when he was under the battlements, he shouted:

"Here is the prisoner! Now give us our chief."

Sol laughed scornfully:

"There is the prisoner, that you said you had not got; but we are not fools. Let him come into the house, and we will send out your chief. Not before."

For he noticed that they did not bring the colonel within gunshot, and scented treachery already.

Carlos waved his hand disdainfully.

"A chief of the Jicarillas never breaks his word. White men's promises are not worth a spavined pony. Send us out our chief, and we will give you your own."

"We will do no such thing," said Sol firmly. "Send in our friend, or we hang your chief over the battlement. Send him to the edge, men."

And a third time the unfortunate chief was dragged to the edge of the battlement, while Sol prepared to toss him over.

The sight determined the hesitation of Carlos, who turned and waved his hand to his followers. They quickened their pace, and the white prisoner was brought beneath the walls of the house, to a place where they could see him plainly.

As soon as he was within ear-shot, Sol shouted:

"Cunnel Bigbee, if the red villains have hurt ye, call it out and we'll take it aout of them. Are ye all sound?"

He spoke in English, and the colonel answered in a weak voice:

"They hit me in several places; but I'm all right yet. Don't give in to 'em, boys. Draw a bead on me, Jim, and *don't let them torture me*."

Pistol Jim paled slightly, but leveled his rifle at the prisoner, answering cheerfully:

"All right, cunnel."

CHAPTER XXI.

SOL KEEPS HIS WORD.

WHETHER the Indians understood the English words or not, they did not seem to heed them, and evidently misunderstood the action of Pistol Jim in leveling his rifle over the battlement.

Carlos waved the white flag, and cried out savagely:

"Fire on us, if you dare!"

Sol laughed scornfully.

"We don't care to fire at *you*. You have a prisoner in your hands, and you are going to torture him to death. You have been fools enough to bring him here. Before you shall do what you have threatened, we will shoot him ourselves, and, after that, hang your chief over the battlement."

Carlos smiled unbelievably.

"Kill your own friend? What fools are you! You say you want him, and here he is. Now, treat for him. If you do not give us a thousand ponies for him, we will light a fire out there, and burn him to death before your eyes."

Here the colonel raised his voice and cried aloud in Spanish, so that the Indians could understand him:

"Shoot me dead, friends! Texans never yield."

The Indians stared at him as if they could not comprehend such a notion, and Carlos said sneeringly:

"Fool, do you wish to die so soon? We will give you all the death you want, if you will wait a little."

Bigbee smiled as he moved his head toward Pistol Jim. He could not move hand or foot to point.

"If I must die," he said, "I prefer to die by the hand of my own men. Move me from here, and you will see that a Texan is not afraid to die, though he disdains to let a cowardly Indian torture him."

"That's the talk, cunnel," shouted Ringtail Thomson, exultingly. "We've got the cusses naow, and ef they try to move ye, we'll riddle the hull gang. Three cheers for Texas!"

And over the wall came the rifles of the Texans in a row, with such an ominous look about their black muzzles that the Indians in the truce-party, thinking they were going to be fired on, began to wheel their horses, shouting to each other excitedly.

Sol, seeing that the fracas bid fair to end in the death of the prisoner, shouted down, at the top of his voice:

"Leave the white chief there, and we will send you down your own chief. Refuse, and we shoot him at once, and hang your chief over the wall. No delay. Leave him, or you lose both men at once!"

He pointed to the row of black muzzles on the top of the wall; and the Indians, without waiting any longer, scurried away, leaving their prisoner on the pony, where he had been lashed.

"Now, boys," said Sol, hurriedly, "keep the top of the house, and I'll go down and bring in the cunnel. Keep us both covered, and have the chief ready to swing over, if they try any tricks."

Down the stairway he rushed and threw open the doorway, when the Indians, in the distance, thinking they were going to be cheated, and crazy for revenge, opened a heavy fire, and came rushing down at full speed toward the house.

There was no time to be lost, and Sol ran to the pony, on which the prisoner was securely tied.

He had his knife in his hand, and one or two desperate slashes divided the cords that bound the wounded Texan to the saddle. Then the gigantic Yankee lifted the colonel off as if he had been a baby, and ran into the house with him, barring the door, just in time to keep out a rush of Indians, who came up at full speed, firing a perfect tempest of bullets ahead.

Once inside, he carried the colonel up to the roof, hearing, from the rapid firing, that the Texans were engaging the Indians and doing their best. He reached the roof safely, and laid the body of Bigbee down. Then he ran to the fettered chief, and hurried him to the edge of the battlement, where he showed him to the Indians, and threw the noose of the lariat away from his neck.

The action caused a lull in the firing, for the sight of the chief calmed them, and the stalwart Yankee beckoned to them that he was going to bring them down Geronimo at once.

His action was greeted with a wild yell, and he cut the cords that bound old Geronimo, and led him to the stairway.

He was about going down there, when Bigbee, who seemed to have been so much crippled by his bonds and hurts of all kinds that he had hitherto been unable to walk, raised his head, and feebly asked:

"Isn't that Geronimo?"

"Yes, cunnel," said Sol, proudly. "Ef it hadn't been, *you* wouldn't be where you are. We promised to trade him for you, and now they've done their part of the bargain, we've got to do ours."

Bigbee raised himself on his elbow, his excitement giving him strength, as he cried, angrily:

"You're a fool. Never give in to an Injun. Now you've got him, keep him. If you give that man up we'll never get aout of hyar in God's world. Keep what ye've got, and *make 'em let us through*."

Sol looked down at the Texan and then round at his friends. They were listening to him in a manner that showed they thought his words not far wrong.

"Look here, cunnel," said the big man, gravely, "that may be the way ye do it in Texas; but in New Hampshire we don't do no sich thing. I've give my word to the Injuns that I'd give 'em back their chief, and I ain't going to let no Injun call me a liar!"

Bigbee managed to stagger to his feet, and laid his hand on the arm of the Indian chief,

while he cried, in a voice weak with angry excitement:

"I tell ye ye don't know anything abaout Injuns, ye Yankee fool. I'm your boss, and I order ye to keep that chief, and not let him go till we're safe over the river—if then. D'ye think I'm a fool, to lose half my stock and get knocked araound by a passel of Injuns, and then let the red cusses git off, when I've a chance to git squar? No, *sir*. We've got Geronimo, and thar's a price of ten thousand dollars on the cuss's head. He don't git aout of this house till I git back every head of my stock."

Sol looked round at the cowboys, and asked them:

"Say, boys, air you in for breakin' your words like this, or not? I don't blame the cunnel so much, for his head's nigh turned with the way he's b'en treated; but *you're* cool. I promised the Injuns that they should have the chief, and he's got to go to them. The rest we kin take keer of arterwards."

"I say the Indian *shall not* be given up!" cried Bigbee, with the same appearance of weakness and nervous irritation, that showed how he must have suffered in the hands of the Indians, though only there for one night. "I'm the boss of the ranch, and I call on you men of Texas to obey my orders against this insolent Yankee, that comes down here to teach Southern gentlemen what they shall do and what they shall not do. I order *you* to keep the Indian here, and open a parley with his friends. We have to get to the river, and we can never do it unless they choose to let us. We are on Mexican soil, and we've had the luck to cheat them. Don't give away a point with an Injun. It won't do; will it, Curley?"

He appealed to Curley instinctively, as if he realized that the quiet cowboy, being the only person there of good education, his word would likely have an influence on the Yankee.

Curley shook his head.

"I've nothing to say on the subject, Colonel Bigbee," he said. "Sol was the man who crossed the river to save your life, when all the rest of the boys hung back, and we've obeyed his orders so far. He has done pretty well for a Yankee, even you must admit."

Bigbee turned to Pistol Jim.

"Will it do to give a point away, Jim?" he asked.

"If ye ax me *that way*, cunnel, it *won't*," said Jim, soberly. "If we let Geronimo go, ten chances to one the Indians will hang raound and try to kill us all afore we kin git over the river."

"There; I told you so!" exclaimed Bigbee, triumphantly, as he turned to Sol. "Don't be a fool, Piper, but do as I order you. I've been in more battles than you ever thought of, and I know what I'm doing. I'm an old Indian-fighter and you're a greenhorn—"

"Then why didn't ye keep from being run in?" asked Sol, dryly. "I ain't no Injun-fighter, cunnel; but if I'd staid over on the other side of the river *where would you have been*? I made the bargain with the Injuns, and I'm going to keep it. Arter we give up the old chief it's time to talk of gitting back over the river."

Here old Geronimo, who had listened to the rapid and excited English with the stolid impassivity of a man who neither knew nor cared what was going on, inquired in Spanish:

"What does the white chief say? Does he wish to *break his word*?"

He spoke quietly, with a certain accent of scorn at the idea of such a thing in every tone of his voice, and Bigbee colored at the words, but obstinately went on:

"Word or no word, I know the Injuns and you *don't*. No one ever thinks of keeping faith with an Injun. They're just the same as wild beasts, and a man who treats them as human beings deserves to lose his scalp. I call on my men to support me. That Injun *shall not* go to his friends till they have drawn off from between us and the river, at the very least. Come, Jim, you know I'm right. Stand by me."

Again he appealed to Pistol Jim, who replied gravely:

"I know ye're right, cunnel, as injuns goes; but that ain't the thing naow. Hyar's Solid Sol come and saved your life, and he says he's a man that keeps his word. Ef he wants to, *we ain't the men to help you make him break it*, and that's abaout the size of it."

Here the two Thomson brothers, who had been looking on in silence, nodded their heads in approval of the sentiment, and Bigbee broke out wildly:

"What, boys, are you gwine back on me for a Yankee tramp that I took out of the gutter and made a man of? Stand up for the South, if you ain't turned mudsills!"

And he glared at Sol savagely, while his hand went to his belt in the instinctive search for the pistol that had always been his best argument against insubordination.

Sol, seeing that any further argument would only excite the weakened frame of the colonel, who had evidently suffered a good deal from the Indians, put his hand on Geronimo's shoulder and led him off to the stairway without more ado. The old chief bowed gravely as he obeyed the gesture, and the half-frantic ranchero, see-

ing that his men would not obey him against Sol, staggered after Geronimo and was about to clutch him, when Curley Pink and Pistol Jim put themselves in his way with folded arms, the latter saying quietly:

"Naow, cunnel, don't ye, don't ye. We ain't in Texas naow, and Sol saved yer life."

"It's an infernal lie!" cried the colonel, angrily. "I saved it myself, when I told you to shoot me dead. The Indians didn't believe that a white man dared to call down death, and their nerve broke then and there. The rest was all easy. Let me get at the Injun, I say!"

And he tried to get at Sol as he descended the staircase, but was unable. A few moments later he heard the wild yells of the Indians outside, announcing that they had caught sight of their beloved chief, safe and sound; and then came a hush, as if the old chief was making a signal for silence.

Then came the sound of his voice from below, as if making them a speech of some sort.

The curiosity of the colonel overcame his anger, and he crept to the edge of the battlement; for he was too weak to walk. Looking down, he saw the Indians, at a little distance from the house, seated on their horses, listening intently, while the solemn voice of the old chief came from the foot of the wall. Then, to his surprise, the whole array broke up, and the Indians began to move away at a walk, while old Geronimo stepped out from the doorway below, and slowly mounted the very pony on which Bigbee himself had been tied as a prisoner, not many minutes before.

The Indians moved off slowly and reluctantly, as if they hated to do what they were doing; but the Texans saw them dividing from the path toward the river, as if leaving the way open.

Then the voice of the Yankee giant came to him, as Solid Sol said coolly, close to his elbow:

"Ye see, cunnel, honesty's the best policy with Injuns, the same as other men. There's all the Injuns gone from between us and the river, and they see we ain't afraid of 'em, nuther. Whenever you're fit to ride, we'll git out of this."

The rancher could make no answer. For once in his life he had to acknowledge in his heart that "the Yankee" had got the best of him. He sat down on the battlement and began to feel his limbs, to see if he was hurt as badly as he thought. The Indians had tied him, hand and foot, with all the cruelty of their race, in a manner to inflict as much torture as possible, and break down his nerve, in preparation for the torture they had designed for him. He had had nothing to eat since the day before at noon; had received several arrow-wounds and knife-slashes, that were sore and stiff; and on the whole felt about as miserable as a man could.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE EXCHANGE.

WITHIN half an hour from the time that old Geronimo went out from the house of the alcalde there was not an Indian to be seen in opposition to a crossing of the river; but then came an unlooked-for obstacle.

No sooner did the Mexicans find that the Indians had kept their agreement and gone away, than the cupidity of the alcalde was excited, when he found that he was to have no share in the reward for the ransom of the prisoner, who had been released without any relation to the "power of the Republic of Mexico."

This would not have mattered so much, had it not been for the weakened state of Colonel Bigbee, who, moreover, had no horse to ride, and was in no state to run the gantlet of a fight, all the way to the river, against the Mexicans, who numbered several scores, and had the best of horses, though their arms were indifferent.

The alcalde demanded, before he would let them go, a hundred ponies as a ransom, without which "his duty would compel him to detain the horses of the party and keep three men as prisoners who had not violated the sacred soil of Mexico."

The Texans heard the demand, and all but Sol looked savage, with the memories which no Texan ever forgets, of Goliad and the Alamo, to make them think the worst of their Mexican neighbors.

Pistol Jim growled that "the best way with a Greaser was to fight the way out." Curley Pink looked to the loading of his revolvers, and the Thomson brothers eyed the Mexicans, who stood below the house, as if they desired nothing better than the chance of another siege; but Solid Sol, in the most cheerful way, announced that he "guessed the alcalde was about right, and that the ponies would have to be given up."

Colonel Bigbee was very indignant at the idea and insisted that "before they gave in to a Greaser they should try the effect of a siege."

"We've got the alcalde's house, and we can hold it against any number of Greasers," he said. "In the night we'll send over the river to get help, and when the boys hear that the Greasers won't let us go they'll come over and knock blazes out of them."

"The boys know it already, cunnel," said the

Yankee giant. "I sent over Pepper last night to tell 'em all about it, and ye see they hain't come over yet. The easiest way is the best way. Your life is well worth a hundred ponies, ain't it?"

"That may be; but I'm not the man to pay them, if I can help it," the colonel said, sullenly. He was looking down from the battlements as he spoke, and his face was darkening, as he noted that the alcalde was disposing his men, with their clumsy brass blunderbusses, in a circle, to cut off any chance of a dash for liberty.

Sol pointed down to the Mexicans.

"As far as they're concerned, cunnel, I ain't afraid of them for the rest of us; but we couldn't git you through alive. You don't know how them Injuns took it out of you yet. You're weak as a calf six hours old, and ye couldn't ride a fractious hoss, if they give ye one. Them yellow cusses has got all our hosses, and if we go out of hyar we've got to do it on our feet, unless they choose to give us the beasts. The sooner we tell 'em they kin have the ponies, the better for us."

"Well, we can promise them the ponies till we get over the river, and then let 'em whistle for 'em," said Bigbee.

Sol shook his head.

"Couldn't be did, ef it was right, and I ain't sayin' it wouldn't be right to cheat 'em when they've took advantage of us. But they wouldn't trust us across the river. They'll want a bondsman."

Bigbee started.

"A bondsman! What do you mean?"

"I mean, cunnel, that they won't let the hull party go across the river, till they see the ponies on this side. They'll want one of us to stay as a bondsman, to be sure the rest don't cheat them."

The conjecture turned out to be correct, as soon as they opened negotiations with the alcalde, which they did from the safe refuge of the house-top; being determined to give him no chance to make a treacherous attack on the party inside, and knowing well that the Mexicans would not dare to make an open assault, in a place where the chances are against them.

Sol waved a handkerchief from the battlement, and called out to the alcalde:

"We want to talk."

The Mexican made a signal to his men, and came to the foot of the wall, where he bowed low and called out:

"I salute the gallant Americans, and desire to hear what they have to say to the great Republic of Mexico."

"We desire only liberty to leave the place, and cross the river," said Sol.

"I have already announced to you the only terms on which you will be permitted to leave the soil of the Republic," said the alcalde, puffing out his chest. "I am responsible to the Government for the damage you have done. The Indians have gone off; and the claims of the Republic must be satisfied. We demand a hundred ponies for the ransom of the party."

"We are willing to give them," said Sol; "but to get them, we must be allowed to go across the river. We have no stock on this side, as you know, save what the Indians have stolen."

"Then you can send one of your party over to get them," said the alcalde, firmly. "The rest can stay here, till the ransom comes."

The Texans looked at each other, and Bigbee was about to interfere, when Sol made a signal for silence, and said:

"We have with us a wounded man, who is not able to travel alone. We came across the river to save his life. He must be allowed to depart, with three men with him. I am willing, myself, to stay here and wait till the ransom comes. If it does not come, you are at liberty to take me to Chihuahua, and have me shot, if you please. But the rest must go."

The alcalde looked up as if surprised.

"And are you really willing to stay as a hostage?" he asked.

"I have said so," replied Sol stiffly. "Will you let the rest go? That is our condition. If you do not consent, we will open the fight at once; and you have seen how we can fight, when we are driven to a corner."

The alcalde hesitated a moment, and then asked permission to "hold a consultation with his friends."

"You can call your friends here, under the wall," said Sol, in the same stiff, haughty tone. "If you attempt to move from where you are now, you will be shot."

Even from the distance at which he was, he could see the nervous start of the alcalde, and the whiteness of his face. The muzzles of four rifles were covering him as Sol spoke; for the quick-witted Texan realized that the negotiation demanded a show of force at this moment.

"We are under a flag of truce," stammered the alcalde. "You would not fire on us, now?"

"You have expressed a doubt of our honor," said Sol coldly, "and we are at liberty to doubt your own. Call up your friends and hold your consultation. If you refuse our terms, the fight can begin."

The alcalde wilted at once, and stammered:

"There is no need for any talk. I am the Alcalde of Candelero, and they will do as I say. I consent to the terms."

He began to back away, when Sol ordered him to halt, in his sternest tone.

"Stay where you are till the thing is done. Tell your men to bring up our horses and I will come down. I am the hostage, and I am going to be sure that you have no other."

The alcalde looked up at the black tubes, along the top of the wall, shivered, and finally made up his mind to stay where he was.

He shouted to his men to "bring the horses of the Yanquis," and the animals came trotting round the corner of the next house, where they had been tied up all night, without a mouthful to eat.

"Now," said Solid Sol, turning to the colonel, who by this time looked so pale and listless that it was evident the reaction from his fatigue and hardship was coming on, "the quicker you git into the saddle, cunnel, and take your way to the river, the better for you and yours. I kin take keer of myself while you're gone. If you think a hundred ponies is too much to pay for a Yankee's life you kin stay over the river; but one thing you can't rub out, a Yankee saved your life. Good-day, sir."

He made a signal to the other men, and they took hold of the almost insensible rancher and half-led, half-carried him down stairs to where the alcalde stood, shivering at the idea of being shot if he stirred. Sol remained at the top of the house, with his pistol leveled at the trembling Mexican, till he had seen the Texans mount and ride off. Then he put up the weapon and slowly descended the stairs to the open air, where he found the alcalde looking dazed and confused, but not yet stirred from his place.

Solid Sol walked up to him and laid his hand on the shoulder of the astounded Mexican, saying quietly:

"Now, alcalde, I'm your prisoner till they send the ponies. I suppose you will treat me civilly. It may be as well, if you do, for, from all I've heard, there are a number of soldiers, who have been on a scout up the river, and who must be back very soon. If they come and hear that you have undertaken to treat an American prisoner badly it may be bad for the Republic of Mexico. The Yankees will not stand much trifling from the Republic, any more than they would when Santa Anna was President. If you want my weapons, here they are. I don't want them any more."

He took from his belt the revolvers which he had taken from the Indians he had killed and handed them to the astonished alcalde, who took them with a stupefied air, looked alternately from the cool Yankee to the fast-vanishing figures of the Texans, now well on their way to the river, and at last said:

"Santa Maria, but you Yankees are queer people! There is not a man in Candelero who would have gone to Texas and left himself a prisoner to save another man."

Sol shrugged his shoulders, and was about to answer when he saw a horseman, coming at speed from the river. A glance showed him that it was little Pepper, and he saw the small cowboy stop and speak to Colonel Bigbee and the rest. Then Pepper shook his rein and came up at the same tearing pace. When he reached Sol he leaped from the saddle, and said emphatically:

"The boys has told me what you're a-doin' hyar, Sol, and ef you think Tom Gray is gwine to let you do it alone, you make a mistake. I'm with ye, live or die."

CHAPTER XXIII.

LITTLE PEPPER.

THE Alcalde of Candelero stared at Pepper suspiciously—for he did not understand the English words—and asked the little cowboy:

"Who are you, and why did you come here?"

Little Pepper faced round and strutted up to the alcalde; his belt bristling with arms, his small figure swelling with importance, as he said, in bad Spanish:

"I came here to see that my friend is not hurt. He does not know how to shoot, and I have come to take care of him. If you harm a hair of his head, I will kill you all, and burn your village."

The brag was in regular Texan style; and the alcalde, seeing the small size of the man that made it, began to laugh scornfully, when he was checked by the sudden action of the little Texan.

Before he knew where he was, Pepper was by his side, with one hand on his arm, while the other held a cocked revolver close to his head, as the cowboy said grimly:

"You will beg pardon for laughing at me, at once."

Small as he was, there was something in his eye that frightened the alcalde, for he realized that a refusal would bring a shot, in spite of the fact that he was surrounded by his men. Hastily he stammered to Pepper:

"I beg pardon. I was not laughing at you; but at a thought that struck me."

Pepper returned the pistol to his belt at once, with a smile, saying:

"Thanks, alcalde; but one should not laugh

before gentlemen, without giving them a chance to share the joke. You will need my friend and myself, before long, perhaps."

There was something in his significant air that excited the curiosity of the alcalde, who asked:

"Why, what is going to happen?"

Pepper pointed up the river, where the Indians had gone.

"As I came across," he said quietly, "I saw that the Indians were getting ready to move down here. They were sending back a lot of ponies and stock; and their scouts were coming down the river. I fancy that they are going to take their revenge for losing our stock by taking some of yours. If that is so, you may need all the help you can get; and we Texans are not to be laughed at, alcalde, in a fight, as you are aware."

The alcalde started at the news and hurried off to send out some men in the direction taken by the Jicarillas and Chiricahuas, to find what truth there might be in the report. As soon as he had gone, Pepper said to Sol, in an undertone:

"If we kin skeer these Greasers, by makin' 'em think the reds is comin' arter 'em, we kin git off, to-night. Cunnel Bigbee says he won't give a pony to git you out of thar hands; and told me, ef I couldn't help ye, he warn't gwine to help no Yanks. The cunnel used ter be a good-enough man, Sol; but I'm thinkin' the Injuns must have hurt his head, some way. He don't act jest right, and the boys don't like it nuther, ef he be the boss of the ranch."

"Do you mean," asked Sol, "that when you stopped to speak to him, he told you that?"

Pepper nodded.

"That's jest it. I seen him and the boys a-comin', and says I, 'Haow air ye?' And then he laughs, kinder uneasy like, and he says, 'We're all right naow, Pepper; and we've cheated the Injuns and the Greasers, too. They think we're gwine to give 'em a hunnerd ponies to git a Yank out of thar clutches; and we ain't gwine to do no sich thing. They kin keep him; and ef they shoot him, it's only one more Yank gone out of Texas. They can't say we run 'em out.' And with that he was ridin' on, when I stops him and says I, 'Cunnel, do you mean that you've left Solid Sol, in the hands of the treacherous, cowardly Greasers, arter he come over the river to save you? And then he grins, and says, in a weak sorter way: 'That's jest what I'm doin', Pepper. Come along with us. One Yank, more or less, won't be missed.' And with that I rips out at him, and tells him, if you're gwine to be left in the hands of the Greasers, he'll lose another hand, too; for I warn't gwine to leave ye; and with that I goes off. And now tell me what the trouble's about?"

Sol gravely related what had happened, adding:

"The cunnel ain't responsible for what he says and does now, Pepper. The Injuns has used him that bad, that he ain't in his senses. When he gits hum, and the boys tells what's happened, thar won't be wantin' the hundred ponies the alcalde asked for. Cunnel Bigbee ain't a bad man, and you'll find that out too. But did you mean what ye said to the alcalde, about the Injuns comin' again?"

Pepper grinned.

"They won't find out, afore dark; and afore that comes, I'll, mebbe, see a chance to steal off."

With that, he tied his horse to the post in front of the house of the alcalde, and stood by the doorway, coolly lighting his brierwood pipe, as if there was nothing in the world to trouble him, while the Mexicans of the village, who thought that they had the two men safely enough, yet watched Pepper a little uneasily, as if they were not quite willing to tackle him yet, bristling as he was with arms.

The contrast between him and his gigantic friend, as they stood there, was great enough to excite a smile, especially in consideration of the patronizing way in which the small cowboy stood by the giant, as if on guard to see that he came to no harm.

When the alcalde had dispatched his scouts up the river, to see if the Indians were going to make another attack, he came slowly back to his own house; and as he neared the doorway, Pepper took off his broad hat and favored the magistrate with a low bow, as he said politely:

"Pray walk in, alcalde. The house is yours, and all that is therein."

Now, the alcalde had always been accustomed, in true Spanish style, to make just such an address to any guest who chanced to come to his house. It meant nothing, and was a regular Spanish compliment. But it was odd that the same phrase, coming from the lips of another man, and addressed to the real owner of the house, grated on him; so he drew himself up proudly and answered:

"It is indeed, señor. I believe it is my place to do the honors of my own house, not yours."

Pepper smiled placidly.

"It is a mere figure of speech, of course, as you are aware, as a Spaniard. I mean simply that I am glad to see you, and to ask you to come in. We will have dinner, whenever you

are hungry. As for myself, I feel as if I could eat a wolf, just now."

The alcalde stared at the little Texan in a puzzled manner for an instant, and then broke into a smile, as he said:

"The señor is fond of his joke, I perceive. But, till we have found out whether the Indians are likely to disturb us at our meal, it might be as well to keep on the watch."

Pepper shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please. If you are not hungry, you need not eat. My friend and I must get something, for Texans always get ill-tempered if the dinner is late. Señor, I salute you. Come, Sol."

And the little Texan ran his arm through that of the Yankee giant, and led him off on a tour of inspection through the house, which resulted in finding the kitchen, in the open air, at the back of the court, round which the great house was built.

There was no one in the kitchen; but the universal roller and stone slab for making "tortillas" was there, and Pepper began to shout for "Juanita," and "Maria," and "Concha," and all the Spanish feminine names he could think of, to "come and make dinner."

The sound of his voice brought from the recesses of the house, where they had been hiding in dark corners, several girls with dark eyes and the whitest of teeth, which they showed in smiles at the funny little "Gringo," as they proceeded to obey his call and prepare the simple noon meal. The girls had evidently seen and heard most of what had transpired; and were rather pleased than otherwise at the free and easy way in which the little Texan was behaving, in the house.

Before very long Sol and Pepper were seated in the kitchen, eating with an appetite that was freshened by their long fast; and the alcalde came in to find them thus engaged, when he remarked, with a smile of some constraint:

"The señores are making themselves at home."

"That is what we came for, alcalde," said Pepper, looking up, with his mouth full. "Did you see anything of the Indians yet?"

The alcalde sneered openly.

"No. You must have imagined the thing. There is not an Indian to be seen for miles. The scouts have come back, and report that they have taken up their march for the mountains."

"So much the better for you," answered Pepper coolly. "If they had come, it's my idea that they could have cleaned out this village, and thought nothing of it. See anything of the ponies coming from the other side of the river, yet, alcalde?"

"No," was the grim answer; "and if they are not forthcoming by sunset, it will be so much the worse for you two gentlemen. In the mean time, I have resolved to remove you to the calabozo; for you are aware that you are both prisoners."

As he spoke, Pepper, looking over his shoulders, saw that quite a little crowd of Mexicans had followed the alcalde, and were peering in at the door, with their brass *escopetas* lying over their arms. The alcalde evidently thought that the Texans had done enough in the way of impudence.

Pepper made no answer, but leaned back in his chair, staring at the men in the doorway, with his hands down near his belt. The little man was mentally taking stock of them, and thinking over the chance he would have, if he made a dash for the door, shooting right and left. Before he had made up his mind, Sol rose from the table and came forward to the alcalde.

"We are not prisoners yet," he said quietly. "We are hostages; and, till sunset, we have the right to be free in our motions. Why should you wish to put us in the calabozo? We are safe enough here. The chances of our escape are nothing. You have our horses; and what can two men on foot do against a whole village? If you treat us as guests, and not as enemies, it will be better for you, when our soldiers come to look for us; and that will not be long now."

"Long or short," retorted the alcalde sharply, "I have been braved long enough. You will go to the calabozo, and your friend there, the impudent little Texan, will give up his weapons at once, on pain of being shot."

Then he was turning to his men to give them some order, when the sharp voice of Pepper said:

"Alcalde, take care! Remember that you have but one life, and that when that is gone, you cannot get another."

The alcalde wheeled round, and saw that the little man had his hands down under the table. Then, as he glanced down, he saw, under that table, the muzzle of a revolver, which seemed to be pointing in his direction. Pepper noticed his glance and slight start, and the little Texan laughed as he said:

"One life is as good as another. Order those men out."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GAME OF BLUFF.

FOR one moment the alcalde wavered. No

more words passed between him and Pepper; but he looked the little man in the eye, and what he read there seemed to make an impression on him, for he said, with an embarrassed air:

"Of course, if the ponies come, according to promise, there will be no necessity of your going to the calabozo; but, in the mean time—"

"In the mean time," said the little cowboy, rising slowly and coming over by the alcalde, "you will order those men out of the room and the house, alcalde. You know we are your guests till sunset, and it wants several hours to that yet."

He kept on talking till he had got beside the Mexican, and then ran one arm through his, with an air of familiar affection that did not prevent the alcalde from noticing that the revolver he had seen was held in a peculiar manner behind the back of Pepper, so that he could feel the muzzle touching his side, though the men at the door could see nothing.

The alcalde smiled a ghastly smile.

"You can go outside the house," he said to his men. "It is only a little joke we are having, my friends and myself."

They were all stolid, stupid-looking peons, half Indian by blood themselves, and knew just enough to obey orders, which they did in the same silent fashion in which they had come in.

Pepper watched them till they had left the kitchen, and then in the same familiar manner as before, led the alcalde after them to the door, when he said, quietly:

"Alcalde, I see that the gentlemen of the village have been kind enough to take my horse away, no doubt to feed it. Will you be good enough to tell them to bring it back, and another for my friend, who is, as you see, young and simple, and needs me to take care of him? When the ponies arrive, as promised, we do not wish to make any more delay on the sacred soil of Mexico than we can avoid."

The alcalde stared at him for a moment, and then, as Pepper brought the revolver round and prepared to place it in his belt, but still having the muzzle turned toward the Mexican, he stammered:

"Certainly, certainly. We do not doubt the honor of our valiant guests in the least; but you know the ponies may not come."

"When the sun sets and they are not here, it is time for you to talk," said Pepper, grimly. "Till then, we prefer to have our horses here."

"But the big señor came with two horses," said the alcalde. "It is not possible that he means to ride away from here in such a strange manner as that. One horse is enough for any man."

Sol heard him and answered, in the same rather grim way which Pepper had assumed:

"It is a fashion we Yankees have, and I do not care to break it. I brought two horses here, and I wish them back, saddled as they were, and harnessed together."

"Certainly the señor shall have them," replied the alcalde, who had ventured near them, little dreaming how they would take advantage of his cowardice. "I will go and see to the matter at once."

But as he tried to disengage his arm from that of Pepper, the Yankee giant took hold of the other arm, and said, sweetly:

"We could not think of allowing you to perform a menial service for us. You can give the order, and have the horses brought here, where we can see them, and enjoy the pleasure of your company at the same time, alcalde."

And once more the Mexican shivered slightly and gave in, so that in ten minutes more the horses on which Sol had ridden into the village were at the door, harnessed as he had arranged them, side by side, with the aid of two lariats.

Pepper looked at them with some surprise, and then asked Sol:

"Whar in blazes did you l'arn to ride that a-way, Sol? Seems to me you've b'en somewhar else but butcherin' and teachin' school."

Sol allowed a slight smile to curl his lips, as he said:

"When I was a boy I used to hook it into the circus, times; and I l'arned a heap of things that come handy. I'm getting too heavy for one pony; but two kin take me off like a feather."

Then turning to the alcalde, he continued:

"Excuse me, alcalde, but what's yer name?"

The Mexican puffed out his chest with an air of importance that had not vanished, in spite of his humiliating position.

"I am called Don Rafael Balderamos, Alcalde of Candelero, and the best swordsman in Mexico," he said, with an air of great pride. "If it were not for you Yankees having pistols, we should have driven you into the sea long ago."

"Well, then, Don Rafael," said the giant quietly, "what should you say to this for a piece of fun? We have the whole day to pass away, and the time will have heavy on our hands. I will let you take your horse and sword, since you think you can use one. I will take my two horses and no weapons in my hands, and I will give you a chance to kill me, if you can."

Then, seeing that the Mexican hesitated at the idea, he added:

"And, as there is some difference between our

more

sizes, I will give you another chance still. If you like to give me a sword, I will take any three of your men, including yourself, and bet you a hundred ponies that none of you can hit me, or take me off my horses, while I will unhorse every one of you."

But the alcalde could not see the propriety of this.

"I am much obliged; but why should I do this?" he asked. "If I keep you till sunset, I shall be richer a hundred ponies; and if they do not come, you have promised to become a prisoner. Why should I fight for what I have already?"

"Simply to pass away the time," said Sol placidly. "If you are afraid to venture your men against me, I shall tell the people of Texas that you Mexicans are all cowards. That is all."

Don Rafael frowned. The word "coward" grated on him, though but a little before he had been most mortally afraid. But the same Mexican who flinches from a pistol, is brave enough with steel weapons, and he said, angrily:

"It is you Yankees that are the cowards, when it comes to *armas blancas*." [White arms—steel.] "We of Mexico love the flashing of steel. I will fight you myself; but, as I cannot give up my rights, it cannot be with the sharp weapons. I will let you take your horses and a stick, and we will attack you with sticks also. Then we will show you whether we Mexicans are cowards or not. I have said it."

Pepper, who had been listening to the conversation, here put in his oar, with the remark:

"And if there are any of you Mexican gentlemen that think you can shoot with the pistol or rifle, just trot them out, and I am willing to make a match with them, just for the fun of the thing."

It was a rather singular thing that the Mexican, who had just made his match with the gigantic Sol with such confidence, drooped and paled at once at the proposition of the thin, dried-up little Texan, who weighed less than a hundred and twenty pounds. With a slight shiver, that he could not repress, he said:

"Many thanks, señor, but the pistol is not our national weapon, and we are content to let the Yankees have the best of it. In *white arms* we are the kings; but in firearms we give you the precedence."

Then he called out to his men, who were lounging about, as if not quite knowing what was to be the end of the whole affair:

"Send here Martino Romero, Garcia Mendoza and Diego Ruiz."

The summons brought out three stalwart, heavy-built Mexicans, who came strolling toward the house, each with his *serape* thrown over his shoulder, and a big *machete*, or broadsword, strapped at his side, and clanking against his huge spurs as he walked.

These three men strolled up to the alcalde, and Don Rafael, in a tone of great pride, said to Sol:

"There, Americano, behold the three *spadachins* of Candelero; the men who have never met their match with white arms. Do you still think that you can conquer them and myself, single-handed?"

Sol eyed the three Mexicans keenly, and they returned the compliment, for they had heard the words of the alcalde and knew what was expected of them in the matter. As the alcalde had said, they were professional "*spadachins*" or swordsmen, who are to be found in all Spanish-American countries, wandering from village to village, where there is a fair or a feast-day, ready to measure swords with all-comers and compete for prizes. It is true that they rarely fight for prizes with sharp weapons; but their duels are frequent, and the way in which they looked at Sol showed that they thought there was a duel to the death in prospect.

Sol scanned the three spadachins carefully, and then said to the alcalde, with a grave air:

"They look like good men; and yet, as I have said that I will fight them, it must be done. But, if they are to use their swords I must use mine too; the one that I gave up to you when I surrendered to you as a prisoner."

The weapon he referred to was the old cavalry saber of Colonel Bigbee, which he knew to be as sharp as a razor, and a long and heavy weapon, into the bargain.

The alcalde stared at him.

"Surely you do not wish to fight these spadachins, who are on their own ground, with the sharp weapon?"

Sol nodded.

"That is my intention. If it were a mere matter of sticks, they might be beaten again and again, and yet get the best of me. With a sharp blade, there will be no mistake about who is beaten."

The three spadachins heard him speak, and though they said not a word they rolled their dark eyes from one to the other, in a significant glance, as if they felt that the chances were all in their favor.

The alcalde, who knew them well, hesitated no longer; but said, in a brisk manner:

"Well, if you insist on it, there is nothing more to be said. But, if the ponies come in the

evening, and you are a dead man, remember that I shall not give them up. You will have brought your fate on yourself, and I shall not be to blame."

Sol laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody will blame you, alcalde," he said; "but, at the same time, have you thought of what might happen if I were to kill your three men here and try to run away after the fight?"

The alcalde started at the question, which was put in the coolest of manners. He looked from one to the other, and then said, as he scanned the well-knit frames of the three men that were to fight the giant Yankee:

"If you can conquer the three spadachins of Candelero you are a wonder, and deserve to go free. I will take the risk of that."

Pepper heard him and uttered an exclamation of joy.

"'Tis a bargain, alcalde," he cried. "You have said it with your own lips. If my friend kills these men, he is free to go his own way, and we can keep the ponies."

The alcalde bit his lip, but when he looked again at his men his heart stiffened up, and he said with rather a bad grace:

"Well, yes, I have said it, and I mean it. If he can kill those men, he deserves to go free."

Then turning to the men he added:

"Go get your horses, and kill that man."

CHAPTER XXV.

THREE TO ONE.

THE three spadachins before they went took a good long look at the figure of the big Yankee, and muttered comments to each other as they strolled away toward the village to get their horses. It was evident that they did not feel much fear of him, big as he was, for they had every confidence in their own weapons and their skill in using them. Spaniards, as a rule, and the inhabitants of all the Spanish-American countries are great enthusiasts with the sword, and have a certain skill in its use, after their own fashion, which is a very confusing one to a fencer of the regular European school.

They leap from side to side, and make all their assaults with a great deal of shouting and attitudinizing, while they rarely or never allow the blades of the swords to cross, having a saying that they should be treated "as if made of glass." Feints of the most puzzling description are used, and a man used to fencing in a regular school, where the touch of blades is kept up all the time, is apt to be confused and beaten, before he knows where he is, by the way in which they harass him.

All this, however, was unknown to Sol, who was, moreover, quite unfettered by any traditions of fencing, having never handled a sword till the time he picked up that of the colonel. All he knew was that it was a sharp weapon, and that, if he managed to get a cut in on any one of the spadachins, he was bound to take an arm or leg, if not a head off.

Though he had never seen any fencing in his life, he had read such stories as had given him something of an idea thereof, and in his very ignorance of the danger was more likely to get on with the three adversaries that were to confront him, than he might otherwise have been.

But Don Rafael, who did not wish to leave a chance to his enemy if he could avoid it, was the more ready to stake his success on the issue of the fight, that he had no intention of keeping his word if the result was decided against him. His plan was to get the big Texan, whom he feared the most, wounded in such a manner that he would be unable to defend himself, and at the same time to engage the attention of the spiteful little Pepper in the contest so far that he himself would get an opportunity to steal away out of the range of the little man's pistol. Once out of his reach, the alcalde thought he could hardly fail to capture Pepper. The lives of his men he was quite willing to sacrifice, though his own was very precious to him.

Therefore, as soon as his men strolled away to get their horses, he said to Pepper, in the pleasantest way:

"Now we have made our compact, I had better go and see that the men do not interfere in any manner; had I not better do so?"

Pepper tightened his grasp on the arm of the village chief, as he said, coolly:

"There is not the least necessity for that, alcalde. The best place for a view of the battle will be on the *azotea* of your house here. From thence your voice can be heard, and you can give any orders necessary. Let us go there."

Don Rafael hesitated a moment, when Pepper's eyes flashed like live coals, and his pistol came out in a twinkling, as he growled:

"You'll come with me, or die. Take your choice."

And there was something so pitiless in his glance, that the alcalde shivered and obeyed the impulse of the Texan's arm, with the meekness of a lamb, as Pepper took him to the top of the house, from whence they could see Sol and his two horses below, waiting for the coming of the spadachins.

Once they were alone on the house-top, the polite air of the small cowboy vanished as he said sternly:

"I never joke, alcalde. I know we are in

your power the moment I take my eyes off you. If you have courage enough to let me kill you, it will be easy enough for your friends to kill us; but one thing you may be sure of. If they kill us, you go with us. Sit down there on the edge of the battlement."

And the alcalde, with a face of ghastly pallor, sat down as he was told, while Pepper called out to Sol, who stood by his horses below:

"Don't give away a point, Solid Sol. Give 'em all you know, and more, too. This darned skunk of a Greaser wants to cheat us yet, and we'll git the best of him afore we've done."

Sol at the moment he spoke was quietly arranging the harness of his two horses, so that they might run close together and evenly. He looked up to answer:

"Don't you fret, Pepper. If a Yankee all the way from New Hampshire can't git the best of these yaller brutes, he ought to knuckle down to an Injun, and I can't say more'n that. I'm ready for the three of 'em, and you'll see what I'll do with them."

As he spoke they heard the galloping of horses, and round the corner of the house rode into the little plaza of the village of Candelero three spadachins in all their bravery.

They were fine-looking fellows, dressed in the utmost finery of Mexican dandyism. They had nothing else in the world to do but to fight and look handsome, and they did both well.

Their dress was of a different color for each. Ruiz wore a suit of blue velvet with gold lace all over it and gold doubloons for buttons; Mendoza had the same kind of dress of brilliant scarlet, with a little more lace, while Romero, who was the youngest and handsomest of the three, wore bright yellow velvet, with a crimson sash, to give a contrast of color.

All three had handsome horses, perfectly trained to stop at full speed inside of a blanket, to wheel round on their haunches as on a pivot, and to execute all the tricks of which a Mexican pony is capable.

Sol watched them coming round the corner from behind his two horses, and the three spadachins drew up in the midst of the plaza with a great clash and dust, drew their swords as with one motion and saluted in all directions.

There was a great clapping of hands from the tops of the houses, where half the female population of Candelero had by this time assembled; the news of the singular contest having spread far and wide from the mouths of the spadachins themselves.

When Sol finally tightened his last strap and leaped on the back of his coupled steeds, with a foot in either saddle, there was a faint round of applause, which was instantly suppressed, and then the attention of the populace was riveted on their own champions.

The three spadachins, the moment that Sol came in sight, wheeled their horses and saluted him. The giant, standing up, holding the reins in one hand, waved them a salute with the other, but had not yet drawn his sword. He seemed to be occupied at first in trying the paces of his horses and wheeling them to and fro in the plaza, as if to exercise them and find what they were capable of doing.

At last he flashed out the long saber and waved it in the air as a signal to the three spadachins that he was ready to sustain their attack.

They had waited patiently enough for him, for there did not seem to be any idea in their minds of treachery, though the alcalde had been wishing that they would attack and cut the Yankee to pieces before he was ready to receive them.

But they felt perfectly sure of their victory and did not wish to lower themselves in the eyes of the people of the village, who were watching every movement with interest and anxiety.

The contest seemed to every one so unequal that the three spadachins, instead of riding at Sol all together, sent a single man to the first assault; Diego Ruiz, the blue-clad warrior.

He put spurs to his pony when he was ready and dashed straight at Sol, who came to meet him with his horses at full speed.

As they passed, the spadachin, with an active wheel of his well-trained pony, turned round both of Sol's horses, so as to take their rider on the left side, in the position where he would be at the greatest disadvantage, and pressed close up to him, intending to give the giant a cut across the legs, which he would be in no position to parry with his right hand.

The people on the house-tops raised a yell of triumph and of scorn of the Yankee for being taken in so easily; but the shout died away in another minute, as the giant whirled round in his saddles, standing with his back to his horses' heads, and confronted the spadachin with a great advantage in height and reach, not only foiling his attack, but actually dealing him a slash across the front, that would have decapitated him had he not thrown himself off his horse to one side, and hung there.

Then came an irrepressible groan, as they saw the Yankee leap down from his horse to the ground, on the same side where hung the body of Ruiz, and clutch the spadachin before he could rise again. They saw the Yankee's horse

running wildly away; but Sol had dragged Ruiz into the dust, and they saw him lift his sword, which flashed in the air, as he made a down-cut.

The next minute all was confusion, as the other spadachins, seeing that their comrade was getting the worst of it, put their own horses to speed, and came thundering down to avenge him.

Too late to save him; for, as they came up, Sol was seen running to meet them, and behind him, in the dust, lay a body, in a pool of blood, quite still.

The people on the house-tops saw the two horsemen close in on the man on foot, while the horses that Sol had ridden were galloping away, frightened at the noise.

There was a great cloud of dust and confusion for a few short moments, at the end of which time they caught sight of the giant, in a stooping posture right under one of the horses. Then came a flash of steel, and down went the horse, stabbed through the bowels, while the rider was rolling in the dust, entangled in the accouterments.

Young Romero had escaped the fate of Mendoza, for they saw him gallop out of the dust as if he dreaded the same fate for his own horse; but a moment later he jumped off, and rushed in on foot to help his comrade, who was warding off the blows of the gigantic Yankee as well as he could.

Romero had no more scruples now, as to fair or foul play, for he ran right at Sol, behind his back, as swiftly as he could. But the giant seemed to have eyes in the back of his head from the way in which he suddenly turned, just in the nick of time.

He met Romero squarely, and, while he was engaging the young Mexican, Mendoza, who had been incumbered with his fallen horse, managed to rise and come to the help of his comrade.

Both men were active as cats, and Sol had not yet managed to get close enough to Romero to get a fair stroke at him.

The Mexican saw his friend coming to his help and made a fierce attack on Sol, to engage his attention, so that Mendoza could get in at his back unperceived. The odds were heavy, and Pepper turned pale as he saw them close together.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FATE OF THE SPADACHIN.

THE fate of the young giant who had so boldly undertaken to fight three professional swordsmen seemed to be sealed, and the Mexicans on the house-tops raised another shout of triumph, when Solid Sol suddenly turned between the two spadachins and ran away like a deer, his long legs taking enormous strides.

The two men ran after him, shouting to each other, while the people of the village roared all sorts of insulting epithets as they saw the apparent disgrace of their foe.

But Sol knew what he was about. He found that he was no match in swordsmanship for the men who were trying to close with him, but he knew that his strength and activity would give him the advantage over either of them singly, and wished to separate them, or, at least to get them on one side.

He saw, moreover, that the horses he had ridden, which had run away to the other side of the plaza, had halted there and were looking on at the fight, as if they wanted to know what it was all about. As he ran he called to them, and the animals, recognizing the voice of man, stood long enough to allow him to get to them and seize the bridle of the nearest. Once having that, it was but the work of an instant to leap into his place, and then he wheeled both horses and rushed down to meet the spadachins, who were close behind.

They, remembering what he had done to them, dashed in to stab his horses from below; but Sol, seeing them coming and divining their intention, wheeled his mounts again and galloped off to a little distance, where he stood, shouting out all sorts of taunts to them, and defying them to come and take him. He had no notion of being left in the lurch without horses.

Mendoza and Romero, seeing the advantage he had gained by his long legs, consulted together a moment while there was a short lull in the battle. Then Romero whistled to his horse, which had remained where he had left it when he leaped from its back. The well-trained animal instantly came galloping toward him, when Sol put his own horses to speed and tried to intercept the other horse.

Romero, seeing the danger in which he stood of being dismounted entirely, shouted to his animal to encourage it, and the intelligent beast, wheeling round the other horses, came galloping toward him. Sol, with an impatient cry to his own mounts, coming of between the spadachin and his horse, and made a cut at the head of the charger with his saber, which, had it taken effect, would have ended its career. But the animal, with a skill that seemed marvelous, ducked its head and evaded the cut, while it managed to get round the tails of Sol's horses and ran to its master.

In another moment Romero had leaped on

again, and was galloping at Sol, who, on his part, rushed to meet him, guiding his horses so as to ride over Romero, if he could.

The spadachin came on straight as a string till he was within ten feet, when he suddenly halted short in his tracks and wheeled sharp round. Sol followed him, and the three horses rushed round the curve so close together that the men could almost touch.

Romero leaned over from his saddle and made a slash at the legs of the giant which Sol, with no notion of parrying, yet evaded by a leap in the air.

As he came down from the leap he returned the slash, and Romero caught it, as luck would have it, on the top of the head, which was only saved from being cloven in two by the broad, stiff hat he wore.

The cut shore through the stiff felt and gold cord, taking a slice off the scalp beneath it; but Romero, though somewhat stunned, escaped serious injury and was off before Sol could repeat the blow.

Mendoza, the other spadachin, in the mean time had been waiting his opportunity to get near enough to Sol to hamstring his horses; but the wary giant, watching on every side, and knowing, now that it was too late to recede, what dangerous antagonists he had, kept his horses at a gallop round and round the plaza, trying to get a chance to ride over Mendoza by main strength, but not daring to risk the chance of a wound to his horses in so doing.

He heard the shouts of the multitude from the house-tops round the plaza, and knew that the whole population of Candelero was hoping for his defeat, while he had little hopes that, if he failed to kill his two antagonists, he would be able to escape death at their hands. It was kill or be killed, and as Sol heard the shouts, he set his teeth, and said to himself, grimly:

"I'm not a fighting man; but if it comes to a question of who is fittest to go home to his mother after the fight, I think I'm the man to do it."

He continued his ride round the plaza, watching his opportunity, and saw it at last, when he had got the two spadachins widely separated. Romero was binding up the side of his head, where the slash had caught him, the blood from which annoyed him, while Mendoza was stealing toward him from behind, thinking himself unobserved, to get a slash at his horses' hind legs.

Suddenly Solid Sol wheeled both his horses, and came rushing down on the dismounted man, trying to ride over him by main strength.

Mendoza saw them coming, and for one instant lost his coolness, not daring to stay in the path of the furiously-galloping horses.

He turned his back to flee, and in that instant Sol came rushing after him, so close that he turned desperately to slash at the horses' knees, and try to stop their rush.

The animals instinctively reared up in the air, and as the spadachin saw them coming down, right over his head, his nerve gave way, and he turned again and tried to run away.

Before he could leap aside the hoofs of the plunging horses were on him, and down he went in a trampled mass in the dust, his sword escaping from his hand, while the furious horses tramped on his face and left him almost unrecognizable, helpless, if not dead, in the dust of the plaza.

Then Sol uttered a loud shout of triumph, and swept down at full speed on his last antagonist, who, by this time, had bound up his head, and was ready for the fray once more.

Charging down on Romero, he pressed the spadachin so close that the trained horse he rode could not escape the shock, and in the moment of meeting, the giant leaped off his own horses, right on the spadachin, cutting as he went, and grappling with the other, so close that neither could use a weapon. Down in the dust fell both, and once there, the tremendous strength of Solid Sol gave him the advantage, and he choked Romero into insensibility so quickly that the bush that fell over the people on the house-tops had not changed into shouts before he rose from the dust, and pointed to his three fallen antagonists, waving his hand in triumph toward the alcalde.

Pepper was so delighted at the success he had attained, that the little Texan began to dance on the *azotea* of the alcalde's house and sing songs of triumph, while the alcalde maintained a sulky silence, and the people of the village stared at the scene that they had beheld transpiring, as if they had been struck stupid.

Then Solid Sol called to his own horses and sprung to his place on their backs, riding round the plaza with the mien of a king on his throne, while the people of Candelero, surprised into admiration in spite of themselves, favored the victor with a faint cheer, which ended in a hiss and cursing.

Sol rode his horses up to the side of the alcalde's house, and said to Pepper, as the little Texan looked over the battlement:

"It's about time we went out of this, Pepper. I don't believe the alcalde means to keep his word, and the sooner we get out of this, the shorter will be the chase they will give us to the river."

Pepper nodded, and then turned to the alcalde, saying:

"Now, alcalde, we shall be compelled to deprive ourselves of the great pleasure of your society for a while. We are going to cross a river; and you can attend to your friends, down in the plaza, who have just shown us what you Mexicans know about fighting with a sword."

The alcalde ground his teeth; but did not dare to show any other mark of irritation, in face of the grin of little Pepper, who had his pistol cocked all the time, and a most unpleasant way of pointing in the same direction as the alcalde.

Then Pepper quietly descended the staircase, and mounted his horse, which still stood at the post where he had made the alcalde have it hitched, before the fight, with the spadachins laran.

"Good-by, alcalde," cried Solid Sol, ironically, as he turned his horses' heads toward the river. "The next time the fancy seizes you to try and cheat a Yankee from Texas, let us know how early you get up in the morning, and I will tell you whether you have a chance of success."

So saying, the two Texans rode off toward the river; but had not more than cleared the village, when Pepper cried:

"Gee-whiskers! Hyar come the pesky Injuns again!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SECOND RAID.

SOL turned his head in the direction indicated by the little man, and saw a cloud of dust coming down from the upper part of the river, in a manner that indicated a considerable body of horsemen, while the feathers and bright colors, that could be seen at intervals, showed that Pepper was right in taking them for Indians.

What was worse for the two men, was the fact that the Indians, although at some distance from them, were yet already almost between them and the banks of the river, in such a manner that the white men realized they could not get there, without running the gantlet of the whole body of warriors. What had brought them back, and whether their intentions were hostile or not, neither could tell; but they knew that it would not do to test the matter by riding that way. Without any hesitation, Sol turned his horses down the river, and rode away at a rapid rate from Candelero, followed by Pepper.

They did not put their horses to full speed; but took a hand gallop that carried them at a rapid rate, without the appearance of hurrying too much.

The Indians did not at first seem to notice; for they continued their original course, which was taking them past the village of Candelero. But they had not been riding in the new direction long, before they heard a yell from the midst of the dust; and the whole body came sweeping after them, at a rate that showed they had been seen, and that the Indians were chasing them.

Whether this band was the same that had made the raid, or a different one, they could not tell; but suspected the worst from the way in which they were followed.

Pepper rode a splendid horse, and Sol's mounts, though not so good, yet, having each only half his weight to carry, made good speed.

They might have gone back to Candelero; but both realized that they would be about as badly off there, as any place. So they made the best of their way down the river, edging as close to it as they dared; but finding the effort in vain. Whoever the Indians were, they seemed determined to shut off the white men from the river, and succeeded so well that, after an hour's riding, though they had not gained on Sol and his friend, the two men were further from the water than when they had begun their ride.

As long as they did not try to gain the river, the Indians did not press them close, and Pepper at last said:

"They've got us, Solid Sol. Thar ain't no way we kin git home, without givin' 'em a brush."

Sol had been glancing back at the Indians all the time he was riding; and now he answered slowly:

"I'm thinking, Pepper, that it's that young Geronimo. He's been watchin' us; and he's sot on gittin' one of us, if not two, to roast somewhere up in the mountains."

"He don't git me without he roasts the meat arter the man's dead," was the resolute reply.

"I'd sooner trust the Greasers of Candelero, than an Injun, any time. The Greasers don't roast a man, though they might shoot him."

It was growing near sunset as he spoke; but neither man dared to relax his pace, though their horses were growing weary and sweating profusely. Before them stretched a country covered with dense coppice wood, called "chaparral," and as Sol saw it, he said:

"If we kin git into that wood, Pepper, we may hide from 'em yet, for the night. Don't ye think so?"

Pepper shook his head.

"It's full moon, or the red cusses wouldn't be aout. They would hunt us up, jest as quick, in moonlight as in daylight. I'm afeard we've got to go under. Ef the cunnel had only done his dooty, we needn't be hyar naow."

As he spoke Sol, who, from his greater hight and his position in riding two horses, commanded a better view of the country than the small cowboy, caught sight of the waters of the river where it took a bend, right in front of them at some miles off. He glanced back at the Indians and saw that he would get a chance to escape if they did not prove able to increase their speed.

He urged his horses on to greater exertions, crying:

"We'll git to the river yet, Pepper. Thar it is, in front of us, and once on the other side, we are safe."

Pepper uttered a shout of joy as he stood up in his stirrups and caught sight of the water in the distance.

Within an hour from the time when they first sighted the river the two friends were riding straight toward it in open prairie, while the Indians behind them were urging their horses with their short whips, yelling frantically and trying their best to catch up, but unable to overcome the start they had given the white men.

Sol dashed into the water with his two horses and Pepper followed when the Indians were still a quarter of a mile off. By the time they came up both men were out in the bed of the stream, which was so shallow that their horses had not yet found themselves obliged to swim.

But the very shallowness of the stream was a disadvantage, for the current would not carry them down, and their progress, with the water up to the bellies of their animals, was necessarily slow and kept them exposed to fire for a longer time.

No sooner did the Indians get down to the bank than they opened fire as fast as they could from all the rifles in the band.

The sun was sinking behind the western hills as they began the fusillade, but as the white men were going to the east, the Indians had the light behind them and could make good shooting. The bullets were splashing the water all round the two men, and Sol, seeing that they would inevitably get hit if they remained where they were, called to Pepper:

"We've got to swim for it, Pepper. They can't hit a head, though they might a man. Git down!"

And with the word he dived into the water, leaving his horses, an example followed by the little Texan.

The water was deep enough to set Pepper to swimming, though Sol, from his greater hight, could wade if he wished; but instead of doing this, he sunk his body into the water so that nothing but his head was exposed and allowed the current to carry him down as fast as it would.

Pepper swam the fastest, and made his way toward the opposite shore as well as he could, while the Indians, seeing Sol's head the nearest, concentrated their fire on him and rode into the river and down the bank, with a view of heading him off, almost losing sight of the small cowboy in advance.

The chase became animated, and it was not long before Sol saw that the red-men were coming up with him and that it would not be possible for him to reach the Texan shore without a fight with one or more of them.

They had ceased firing as if disgusted with their own bad marksmanship, but were pushing on steadily, urging their horses to the utmost and getting ready their lances and knives for close conflict.

Sol had nothing with him but the saber which he had brought from Colonel Bigbee's stables; but as he waded along, swimming whenever he came to a place deep enough, he watched the further shore keenly in the hope of seeing some indication of help coming from thence.

There were herds of cattle feeding at a little distance from the river and a few horsemen in sight; but these latter did not take any apparent notice of what was going on, or, if they did, were too cautious to venture toward the scene of the conflict.

The man in the river knew from the direction in which he had been riding that he had got out of the range of either Mesquite or Guadalupe Ranch, and wondered where he could be, but set his teeth as he went on, muttering to himself:

"They shall have a fight before they take me alive."

Within ten minutes from the time he had abandoned his horses he had come close to the Texan bank; but the Indians, to the number of three well-armed warriors, were close behind him, and were already firing pistols at him.

Their aim was poor compared with what would have been the practice of as many white men; but it brought the bullets close enough to the man in the water to show him that he had no chance of escape unless he could throw off his pursuers.

Turning his head he perceived that his three pursuers were at a distance from the rest of the

Indians, who had mostly halted by the further bank, as if a little afraid of venturing close to the Texan side of the river.

The moment Sol saw that he took his decision, and made a step to where he saw, from the darkness of the water in front, that it was a little deeper than where he was.

His step brought him into a hole, and down he went into the water, when the swift current carried him on a few feet with such rapidity that he thought he would be swept away entirely. But the burst of speed only lasted long enough to take him to the other side of the hole, when he ducked his head under, and took hold of the rugged branch of a water-logged tree that had lodged at that very point, making a cover for the sand and mud to accumulate.

In making his step into the water-hole he had gone out of sight, and had sense to perceive that if he could only keep his body down, by holding on to the branch, he would be out of sight of the Indians, who might miss him entirely.

Through the rushing water, as he crouched down, holding on to the branch, he could see them staring up and down the river, as if watching for his head to emerge, and as this did not happen, they appeared to be puzzled.

It was hard work for Sol to hold his breath under the water, and nothing but the hold he had obtained on the chance branch, and the fact that his life depended on it, enabled him to do as he did; but he set his teeth and kept down till he saw the heads of the Indians turned away.

Then he could stand it no longer, and lifted his nose above the water for a breath, ducking under again.

But even this momentary glance was enough for the quick savages, and a wild yell of triumph was raised, as they turned their horses toward him, and came plunging down, prodding in front of them in the water with their long lances.

Sol, seeing that further disguise was useless, rose up out of the water with a shout, and scared one of the ponies, which plunged and tried to turn round. It was the nearest, and before the rider could recover control of the animal, Sol was close enough to make a grab at the spear and clutch it by the point.

In a moment he had wrenched it from the Indian's hand, and sent it flying through the air, right into the breast of the next man behind, who was taken unawares and transfixed before he had any idea that an assault was meditated.

The Indian Sol had disarmed uttered a yell, and made a grab at his pistol; but before he could recover himself the giant was on him, and had his grasp on the weapon as it was drawn.

There was a flash and crash as the pistol exploded; but the ball went into the water, and the next moment Sol had wrenched the weapon from his hand, and with one blow had knocked the savage from his horse into the river, just as a second flash and report showed that the third Indian was firing at him.

The bullet from this second pistol grazed Sol's arm; but the giant, leveling the weapon he had just taken, with a steady aim, fired in his turn, and tumbled the Indian from his saddle, a dead man.

Then waving the pistol in the air, Sol uttered a shout of triumph which brought a regular volley from the other side of the river. The bullets pattered all around him in the water, and he saw that his foes were taking heart of grace and coming on again, while the shouts of men on the Texan bank of the river showed that the cowboys in that direction were at last aroused by what was going on, by the firing.

Sol waded deliberately toward the shore to which he was now close, and landed, to find little Pepper seated on the bank, trying to take the loads from his pistols, which had been wetted in the river, and were now quite useless.

The little man looked worried and angry, and as Sol came up, he said savagely:

"Ef I only had another weepin, I'd make them cusses git up and dust; but what's a man to do with wet powder? A babby might whip me naow, Sol."

"Never mind," said Sol, consolingly. "Here come our friends at last, and there go the Injuns at a gallop. The fight's won, Pepper."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ROUSING THE COUNTRY.

THE horses which Sol had ridden in Mexico had been carried off by the Indians as they retreated, and Pepper had lost his own mount; but the red-men had fallen back to the further side of the river, where they were riding to and fro, up and down the bank, as if hesitating what to do, and hardly daring to cross over.

On the bank where Pepper was sitting there were less than a dozen cowboys to be seen; and they were riding toward the two men who had just crossed, but keeping an eye on the Indians all the time, as if ready to run. If the savages chose to cross, there were at least a hundred of them; and the chances were in their favor, if they made a dash at the stock in sight. There were not enough cowboys to stop them, and the situation was growing serious, as the sun dis-

appeared, and the full moon rose, large and red, in the east.

Sol looked round him and saw that the country on the northern bank of the river was covered with clumps of timber, from any one of which a good stand could be made. He did not recognize the landmarks, so he asked Pepper:

"Where do you suppose we are, now? This is not Mesquite Ranch, and I don't think it's Major Rhett's place either."

Pepper shook his head.

"No, we're ten miles away from thar, at the nighest. This is the ranch of that Greaser feller they call Agostino, and he ain't got a Texan on his ranch. They're all *vaqueros*, and ready to run, the moment they see a Injun. If them fellers comes acrost, we'll have to hide somewhere, and the sooner we git aout of sight, the better for us. Thought we'd be safe this side of the river, but we ain't, yit. Oh! if Cunnel Bigbee had only done as he orter!"

The little cowboy seemed to be cast down at the remembrance of the way in which the ungrateful rancher had abandoned them to their fate among the Mexicans of Candelero, and added as he rose:

"No use tryin' to git the loads out of them pistols, Sol. I ain't no one, to-night. If the Injuns comes, and I ain't got a fire-weepin, I'm gwine to crawl into a hole and die."

He led the way in a dispirited sort of manner up the bank. The uselessness of his pistols, on which he had always depended, had brought the little man to a realizing sense of how small and weak he really was, and how unfitted for the struggle against stalwart warriors like those on the other side of the river.

As he went along, he tried putting caps on his pistols, to fire out the loads if possible, and when at last he succeeded in getting one chamber of one revolver to explode, he was proportionately elated; but the rest were too wet to go off, and there was no way to get the bullets out, save to dig them with a knife, for he had no worm to draw them.

When at last the two friends had gained the shelter of one of the clumps of timber, sprinkled round the country, Sol saw that the cowboys or *vaqueros*, whichever they might be, whom he had seen at a distance, were beginning to hover round them, as if to find out who they were, while hardly daring to approach near them.

A portion of the rest were driving the cattle away from the bank where they had come for their evening drink at the river, and the whole herd was being moved off into the interior of the country. But the Indians on the further bank had not yet gone out of sight; and the Texans saw that it was only a question of a little time when the temptation offered by a herd of cattle would prove too strong to be resisted, and the whole force would cross the river on another raid.

Pepper was engaged with his pistols, digging away with the point of his knife, to get the bullets out, and noticed nothing till Sol observed thoughtfully:

"The best thing you can do, Pepper, if you know any of these men, is to ask for a horse, ride as hard as you can to the nearest ranches, and rouse the country. Those Injuns are going to make another raid, and there's nothing here to stop them."

Pepper started at the news, and for the first time looked earnestly over the river, where the dark body of the Indians could be plainly seen in the moonlight on the further bank, some of them dismounted, as if they were deliberating on the propriety of crossing.

While they looked they saw, in the moonlight, a column of dust that floated in the air in the rear of the Indians, and Pepper said hastily:

"By gum, Sol, you're right! Thar comes more of the cusses. Durned ef I don't believe thar' gwine to make another raid. Whar in blazes has the sogers gone to? Thar ain't one to be seen in all the country. We got to git aout of this, lively, naow. I've seen them raids afore; but never none nigh as bad as this."

So saying, he stole away in the shadow of the clump, and the two friends struck across the prairie to the nearest group of *vaqueros*, waving their arms for them to stop.

The *vaqueros* seemed to be afraid of them for some reason, and instead of stopping, galloped away, so that the two had to plod on, which they did for nearly a mile before they succeeded in getting one of the mounted men to stop for them.

He proved to be a Mexican, a *vaquero* of Don Sancho Agostino, the owner of the ranch, who, as soon as he found that they were white men, explained the apparently mysterious conduct of his friends by saying that they had suspected a trick, and believed that the two white men were sent over as a decoy, to entice them down to the bank, away from their cattle.

"It is the Indian moon, señores," he said, "and we are all in fear that the Indians have made a grand league, and are coming down in force to sweep the country. Such a thing was never known before as their coming out in plain sight in daylight and not hiding. And there is not a soldier in this part of the country. They have all gone up the river, to repel another raid, that we were told was coming from that direc-

tion. The saints guide and care for us! But I fear we are all lost."

"No one need be lost," said Sol, sharply, "if he keeps his coolness and courage. Lend us some horses, and we will rouse the country and fight these red scoundrels away from here."

"If that is all you want, señores," said the *vaquero*, "you can take your pick of the herds round here. I will bring you a horse at once."

And he went off at a gallop, returning in a few minutes with a plunging mustang at the end of a lasso which he offered to little Pepper, with the remark:

"He will carry you to San Antonio, and never fail you. Make a *hakimo* and mount him."

A "*hakimo*" is the Mexican term for a sort of halter, made with a single rope and a loop over the nose of the animal, with which they are accustomed to subdue their wild colts.

Pepper was a good rider, and soon had a *hakimo* made with a piece of the lariat of the *vaquero*, with which he undertook to ride the mustang barebacked, no saddle being attainable nearer than the ranch-house of Don Sancho, five miles off.

But Pepper was used to riding anything that had four legs, and in a few minutes he had subdued the plunging mustang, so that it was racing away at speed toward the ranch-house, while Sol set out in the same direction at his long, swinging trot, which he had not forgotten, and which took him across the prairie at the rate of seven miles an hour till he lost sight of the river.

He kept a sharp lookout all the time he was running for any signs of Indians behind him, but the brick walls of the old-fashioned Mexican hacienda hove in sight over the prairie at last and he had not heard an Indian yell yet. The herds were being driven in all round him, and he had more than one narrow escape, as an excited steer came charging down on him in the moonlight, with the dislike that a Texan steer always shows to a man on foot.

But as Sol had brought with him through all his flight the old saber with which he had conquered the spadachins, while he had not lost any of his skill and strength in dealing with cattle, he beat off these charges without much trouble and at last reached the hacienda, which he found all ablaze with lights, while the whole population of the ranch was afoot, in the greatest excitement, no one knowing exactly what to do.

The sight of the gigantic figure of the Yankee produced still greater excitement, for they had all heard of the "Bull Slinger of the Mesquite Ranch," and he was welcomed as if his coming had been a reinforcement of which they had reason to be proud.

He was taken to Don Sancho Agostino, who proved to be a fine-looking white-bearded old Mexican, full of courtly politeness, but almost entirely devoid of presence of mind in an emergency such as had come on them.

Every moment the *vaqueros* were riding in with reports that the Indians had crossed the river a second time, and that they were coming to the attack in numbers which grew larger and larger as each man made his report.

Señor Agostino was wringing his hands and wondering "whatever he should do," till he appealed to Sol, who said at once:

"If you will do as I tell you, we will beat them off, señor."

"Only do that, señor," said the old Don gratefully, "and you shall have any reward you please to name, to the half of my fortune."

"I want no half of your fortune," was the dry reply. "If the Indians sweep your stock from here, the half of your fortune will not be worth much to any one. Call your men together. Drive off your cattle to the north, in the direction of the nearest American ranch; and let the rest of your men, with all the weapons they can get, go out and fight the Indians, so they will see they have nothing to expect from us but hard knocks."

"But I have but fifty men on the ranch," exclaimed the Mexican, shivering at the idea; "and these savages are hundreds in numbers."

"Give me what men you can spare, and a horse big enough to carry me," said Sol resolutely, "and I will engage to make head against them, till the country is roused. This hacienda alone will stop them, for several hours."

"But they will not stop to take the hacienda, as long as there are cattle to be taken in the prairie," objected the Don.

"Then we will coax them here," said Sol. "Drive off the cattle and give me the men: and you shall see."

And as there was nothing more feasible to be suggested, in ten minutes from the time he entered the ranch, the busy Yankee was mounted on a large mule, taken from Agostino's carriage, and riding back toward the river, with twenty *vaqueros*, armed with pistols, to meet the Indians and watch them. They had not far to go to find them. Before they had ridden a mile, they saw a dark body coming rapidly over the plain; and the moment Sol's *vaqueros* saw it, they shouted "*Indios*," and turned tail to run for the ranch, leaving the Yankee alone, to confront the foe.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FIGHTING MULE.

THE situation in which Solid Sol found himself was desperate enough to have excused any man for fleeing in his turn; but the young Yankee was not made of any such stuff as that. He knew that his mule, large and handsome as it was, probably had not the speed to contend against the fleet Indian ponies, though it would go further in a ten days' march and was well up even to his weight.

The Indians in sight were less than a mile off when they were discovered by the cowardly *vaqueros*, and in a chase to the ranch he was bound to be caught.

He turned his bridle to ride back, but did not hurry his mule beyond a canter, while the Indians, seeing the rate at which they were gaining on him, ceased yelling, and came on in silence, sure of their prey.

Sol's first glance showed him that their numbers had been exaggerated by the fears of the Mexicans, though the party was a large one. He distinguished the figure of Geronimo at the head, the old chief having evidently taken the field in person, his presence being a sign that the raid was to be pressed in earnest. Young Geronimo was not in sight.

Sol knew that if the Indians succeeded in catching him he had no mercy to expect after the way in which he had threatened to hang the chief that very morning. Geronimo had been reconnoitering the country, had found it deserted, and had taken the resolution to try once more for the stock from which he had been driven by the Texans of the ranches higher up the river.

Still Sol kept on his course at the same canter, which the mule kept up without any exertion, till he saw the walls of the hacienda rising before him again, while the Indians were almost at the tail of the big mule he was riding.

Then the giant suddenly gave a whoop, drew his saber and began to prod the mule in the back with the point of the weapon with the most surprising results. The animal uttered a vicious squeal and began to race away at a pace that left the swiftest of the Indian ponies in the rear in the first three jumps. The old mule had been represented to him as possessing marvelous speed "if any man could get it out of her," and the application of the point had done it for the time with a vengeance.

Sol kept up the prodding whenever he felt the slightest sign of flagging in his mount, and the mule, which would have answered a touch of spur or stroke of whip by stopping obstinately, was so much demoralized by the novel method of goading that she ran like a deer and actually carried Sol close under the walls of the hacienda fifty yards in advance of the Indians who had been close to his heels a little before.

They began to yell at this point to strike terror into the souls of the inmates of the hacienda, but were astonished to be received by a heavy fire of *escopetas* and American rifles from the top of the ramparts—for the hacienda was fortified in the old style of Mexico, with thick walls, backed with earth.

Sol heard the bullets whistling round him and the yells of pain from the Indians that followed the first volley.

Then he looked round to find that the whole body of his foes had turned tail and were galloping back for dear life. The walls had stopped them, and they were trying to skirt round them to get at the stock on the prairie.

He was safe himself, but knew that his continued safety and that of the stock in the ranch depended on getting the Indians to attack the walls and detain them there long enough to enable the country to be roused to drive them out.

He darted back after them, shouting all the opprobrious epithets he had learned in Spanish, waving his saber, and daring the Indians to send out a man to fight him.

They heard him, and he saw a wavering in their ranks. There is nothing an Indian likes so much as a pitched battle between champions, when there is no danger to themselves in looking on.

The fire of the rude brass *escopetas*, which only carry two hundred yards at the utmost, and cannot be depended on at more than fifty, was already exciting their contempt; and as he had expected, they turned, and three men came racing back to meet him, while the voice of old Geronimo could be heard, encouraging them to "bring in the white giant as a prisoner. He would give fifty ponies to the man that brought him in, alive, for the torture."

Solid Sol met the three men fairly, and in another moment was slashing away at them with the long, heavy saber, a weapon to which they were evidently unaccustomed, from the way in which they backed off from close contact, while their pistol-shooting was as wild as that of most Indians, and though Sol had his clothes torn, not a bullet made a serious or disabling wound on his body.

The mule he rode was almost unmanageable; but in the very wildness of its plunges and kicks kept the Indians at bay, and before long, Sol had managed to get a square cut at the worst of his foes, and had cleft his skull open, like a gourd.

The other men turned and fled forthwith: but the big mule, having apparently got its blood up by this time, followed and came up with them in a few bounds, running away with the giant into the midst of the Indians, who were coming up behind.

And there was Solid Sol, surrounded by more than a hundred red warriors, cutting away on all sides, the big mule kicking and squealing like a very demon, clearing a ring round her with her heels, while the blows of the heavy saber, in the powerful hands of the Yankee giant, sent the fiercest braves of the Chiricahuas to the rear in dismay, though old Geronimo encouraged them by shouting his war-cry.

Sol saw that the fun could not last long, and tried to turn the vicious animal round; but the mule refused to go that way, and continued on her career through the very midst of the savages, not one of whom could get near enough to him to strike a fatal blow, till she had actually come out on the other side, and was racing away toward the river, like a bird on the wing, with the whole rabble of Chiricahuas in full cry behind her.

By great exertions Sol managed to get the head of his mule turned so that she ran in a circle round the hacienda, and led the mob of Indians, in plain sight from the walls, cutting back at them as he went, till even his great strength began to weary, and he saw that if help did not come speedily, he would be captured.

The Indians began to throw lassoes after him, but he cut every loop, as it settled over his head, with the edge of the sharp blade, and managed at last to get in front of the gate of the hacienda, when a second volley came from the walls, and sent his pursuers to the right-about, even quicker than they had come after him.

Then at last the big mule, seeing the gate in front of her, made a bolt for it, and Sol found himself inside the court of the great hacienda, where the mule stopped, panting and sweating from her mad gallop, and quiet at last.

As he threw himself from the saddle, completely tired out, he heard the voices of the Mexicans shouting all sorts of expressions of wonder and admiration, though, in the excitement of his rapid ride, he had hardly been conscious of what he had been doing.

"You have done marvelously well," cried old Don Sancho, as he came up to the side of Sol. "You have saved the hacienda; and the Indians are too far off from the stock, now, to have a chance of carrying it off. What a man you are! Ten Indians have I seen go down before that arm of strength. You ought to be one of us. You fight like the great Cid himself."

"Then why don't the rest of you do some of the same sort of thing?" asked Sol impatiently. "If these men had been Americans, they would have been out helping me, long ago. If one man can do what you have seen, what could not fifty of the same kind do? Get out your men and make an attack on the Indians. They are ready to run."

But Don Sancho could not see the point.

"You are a hero, a wonder," he said; "we are not the same. You have saved the stock; and if what my men tell me is true, the country is roused, and we shall have help by morning."

"What do you mean?" asked Sol incredulously.

Then the old ranchero told him that the men on the top of the watch-tower of the hacienda had seen fires in the direction of the Mesquite and Guadalupe Ranches, and concluded that the Americans were making signals to each other, and that, if the Indians stayed on that side of the river till morning, they would be sure to be succored by any number of Americans.

Sol heard the news and went up to the tower mentioned, to see for himself what was meant. From thence he could command a view, over the flat prairie, of twenty miles or more.

Sure enough, there was a great blaze in the direction of the American ranches; but the moment he set eyes on it, he saw that instead of a signal, as the Mexican had thought, it was nothing more nor less than the ranch-house of Colonel Bigbee itself that was on fire; and the blaze was increasing each moment with a rapidity that showed the flames to be spreading.

"Don Sancho," cried the angry giant, clutching the Mexican by the shoulder in his excitement. "That is no signal. The Mesquite Ranch is on fire; and, if I mistake not, it is the Indians that have done it. Look down there at the men that have chased me into your hacienda, and you will see how they are watching it. It is their friends. We must go to the help of the Americans. They cannot come to our help."

As he spoke, he rushed down-stairs to the court of the hacienda, and called for volunteers to go with him outside. He had seen that the Indians, round the hacienda, were moving off toward the fire, as if they recognized the cause, and even thought that the sounds of firing, faint and distant, came to his ears, while he was on the top of the house.

At first hardly a man dared think of coming with him, but when he remarked that "all

Mexicans were cowards, and that if he had had a dozen of his own men, he would not fear to follow the whole of the Indians in sight," one swarthy, heavy-built fellow shouted out:

"I am no coward. I will go with the *gringo*, if no one else dares to follow. I am Garcia Perez, and I am ready to die for the honor of the Spanish race."

"Then follow me, Garcia Perez; and if we are the only men in Texas out to-night, we can at least die in defense of the ladies of the Mesquite Ranch. Come on."

Five minutes later he was mounted once more on the big mule, now as gentle as a lamb, after the severe lesson she had received in the fight with the Indians. Sol had conquered her completely by his merciless use of the saber point as a goad, and the mule had made up her mind that she had found her master at last, and behaved with all the docility of a well-trained pony.

Having once accomplished the conquest, Sol found himself provided with a mount that, he felt, would carry him anywhere; and Garcia Perez followed, with some difficulty, from the pace at which the mule went.

The Indians, besieging the hacienda, had vanished to the northwest, the Mexicans not daring to take the only measures that would have detained them in front of the house, and Sol, as he rode along, felt a terrible sense of anxiety at his heart as he thought of the Mesquite Ranch-house, filled with delicate ladies, and their possible fate at the hands of the Indians.

Bigbee House was no fortified brick dwelling, with thick ramparts like the "Hacienda Agostino." It was a frame cottage, lightly built, and unless the men of the ranch could find some method of sheltering themselves from the fire of the Indians, it would be a fight in the open fields, with the odds of ten to one against them.

Luckily for Sol, the distance was no longer great. The ranch of Agostino was only about five miles from that of Bigbee; but the ranch-house was in the center of the colonel's lands, and a good three miles further.

The Yankee giant rode on at an easy gallop, not wishing to provoke a new contest with his mule by pressing her too hard. The two men covered the distance between the ranches in less than an hour, and the nearer they came the clearer was the fire.

That it had been lighted by Indians was evident, for he could see the figures of the red warriors as they dashed back and forth in the light of the blaze firing their rifles and pistols; while, from the midst of the flames came answering reports which showed that the cowboys were defending themselves in spite of the heavy odds against them.

As Solid Sol drew nearer, he saw that the house had been burned, so that only a part of one wall was yet standing, while the stables, close by, were completely destroyed, and the defenders of the ranch had made a stand behind the heavy bars of the horse-corral, whence they were pouring a rapid fire into the Indians, who were circling round at a cautious distance, as if they had not yet got what they wanted.

To get into the corral he would have to run the gauntlet of the circling savages, and the prospect of success was, to say the least, exceedingly dubious.

Garcia Perez, as he drew nearer, began to drop back, and Sol turned in his saddle, with a snarl, to say:

"Well, where is the honor of the Spanish race now? Have you more than one life to live, that you are afraid to follow me? Come on, or stay behind and bear the name of a coward forever!"

Thus shamed into doing his duty, Perez rode up; but his face was gray with fear as he said:

"If I had a dozen lives, señor, I should not fear so much; but, as I have only one life to live, you must pardon me if I fear to lose it. Life is sweet, even to a poor man."

The Yankee giant pointed to the burning house, and demanded:

"Do you suppose that they have not lives there, too? Yet you see they are fighting. We must get there to help them. If you are afraid, go back; but if you want to come on, then take your leave of life and think only of selling it dearly. Come on!"

With that he drew the old saber again, and dug the point into the croup of the big mule. The animal gave a squeal and started off at a tremendous burst of speed, which carried the giant Yankee into the midst of the Indians, in the full light of the fire, before any one was aware he was coming.

As he made his appearance, he gave a great whoop, and there he was, cutting and slashing on all sides with the saber, while the Indians, appalled at the sudden onslaught from a single man, bore back from his blows, and gave him free passage to the bars of the corral. They thought him crazy, from the wild way he came down; and the Indian respect for aberration of mind helped to grant him the clear passage he at last obtained; while, so much were they occupied in watching him, they never noticed Garcia Perez, till the Mexican darted through the very midst of them, and got to the front of the corral, without receiving a shot.

Then rose from the inside of the corral a tremendous

yell, as the cowboys of the Mesquite and Guadalupe Ranches, who had gathered there to make common cause in repelling the sudden attack, saw the figure of the man they had thought dead. Cries rent the air of:

"Solid Sol forever! Give 'em fits, boys! Give 'em fits! Sally out and knock blazes out of 'em!"

In another moment, over the bars came the cowboys, on foot, with their rifles at a trail, and made a dash at the Indians, firing so fast that they drove the circle back for several hundred yards, while Solid Sol got his big mule into the corral, through the gate, and found all his old friends inside, with the exception of the colonel, who was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE CORRAL.

"WHAT'S the matter, boys; and whar's the cunnel?" asked the big man, as soon as he got inside the corral.

Little Pepper, bristling with weapons as usual, his face wreathed in smiles, made answer, pointing to a small tent at the other end of the corral:

"Cunnel's thar, with the ladies. The reds come down, jest arter I got hyar; but we got the boys together, this time, so they didn't git the bulge on us, Sol. Cunnel got a wiper from a bullet on the top of the head, and several aries in his body; but I guess he pulls through. It's durned hard to kill a Texan, ef he's a *reel* one, *born in the State*."

"And whar's Major Rhett?" asked Sol.

He was answered by the major himself, who had been standing close by, watching his men making the sally, and who now put out his hand, saying with the nearest approach to a gracious smile with which he had yet favored Sol:

"Hyar I be, Yank. You done well. I'll never abuse a Yank again. Thar ain't a man in the ranch could have done what you did. Whar did ye git that mule, and haow did ye git aout of the hands of the Greasers of Candelero?"

Sol saw that he had conquered the major at last. Hating, as he did, everything that wore the name of "a Yankee," yet he was not proof against the way Sol had behaved; and his grasp of the hand was too cordial to be mistaken as he added:

"Waal, I *must* say, I never thought the time would come when I'd be glad to see a Yank; but it's come naow. I'm mortal glad to see you, and I wish we had a hundred more like you. I'd take 'em all the way to Chihuahua, and wipe aout ev'ry Injun in the mountings, besides."

But before they could say any more, the sounds of firing outside the corral and the yells of the charging Indians showed that the cowboys were coming back; the Indians following them up, as is their wont. An Indian is never so demoralized that, if his enemy gives over an assault and retreats, he is not ready to harass the movement.

The major turned his head sharply to say, to the few men in the corral, who had not gone out on the sally:

"Git to the rails, boys. Wait till ye see their eyes, and then give it to 'em, *hot*."

The cowboys ran to the rails and poked out their rifles, as their comrades came strolling back, with the cool demeanor, so different from the excitable way in which the Mexicans, Sol had hitherto seen, had always behaved. The giant noticed that not one of them would hurry his pace, though the Indians charged hard down on them.

Each would stop in his place, and turning, point his rifle at the Indian, who would throw himself over the side of his horse, and ride off in a circle, when the cowboy would resume his leisurely walk toward the corral, arrived at which, he climbed the bars and took his place on the other side, ready to resume the fight.

"Major," said the Yankee, frankly, "your men fight a heap better than the Greasers over on the other side of the river, and them Injuns won't git in here, as long as the ammunition holds out."

Rhett nodded.

"That's jest whar the trouble lies," he said, coolly. "We ain't got the powder to last us, if the Injuns comes on in 'arnest; and ef they only knowed it, they've got us whar the ha'r's short."

He spoke as if the matter gave him but little concern; and Sol asked him, with some uneasiness:

"Then what are we to do, if it gives out before they run?"

Rhett shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess we'd have to peg aout. It's all in a man's life."

Then he added to the cowboys near him:

"Keep yer fire till ye feel sure ye've got a red, so he can't dodge. Every bullet that scratches dirt, to-night, is a nail in the coffin of a white man from Texas."

But the Indians did not seem disposed to court any closer and more intimate acquaintance than they had hitherto made with the cowboys. They kept on circling round the bars, and firing a shot or two at intervals, to draw the fire of

the Americans; but not a rifle was discharged in answer, and before long there was a lull in the hostilities.

The Indians drew off out of gunshot; and the cowboys, with the coolness of men accustomed to danger, threw themselves down on the ground, wherever they happened to be, and took their rest, as if there was not an enemy within miles.

Solid Sol went round among them, talking to those he knew; and it was noticeable that the restraint which had existed between him and the Texans had vanished entirely, since his gallant dash into the corral and the deeds he had done across the river, of which the men at home had been informed by the Thomson brothers and Pepper. The Yankee had become as popular with them as he had formerly been the reverse.

But all the while he was talking to them, Sol kept an eye on the tent, and could not restrain a low exclamation of pleasure when he saw the flap lifted, just when the Indians had been quiet for a little time, and the graceful figure of Bessie Bell emerged and stood in the doorway, looking out.

He was surprised, at the same moment, to see Major Rhett rush toward the tent, crying excitedly:

"Go in there, for Heaven's sake! Don't let the Indians see you!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE TENT.

THE bright light of the burning ranch-house still illuminated the interior of the corral and the figure of the girl was plainly to be seen when Rhett uttered his warning cry.

It was answered by a tremendous howl from the Indians in the distance, and the next moment the whole band swept down at full speed past the bars of the inclosure, yelling like demons and firing their rifles as fast as they knew how, coming so close to the bars that it was evident the sight of the girl had inflamed their zeal to a pitch approaching madness.

Sol saw the major shake his head, though the noise was too great to hear what he said, and then the whole circle of the bars was lighted up by a spiteful volley from the cowboys, which took effect on the exposed Indians more severely than any that had yet been fired on either side.

Several Indians were seen to drop, but their comrades picked them up almost in the instant they fell and carried them off again, after which the savages resumed their circling, keeping the defenders of the corral on the watch all the time and giving them no rest.

Sol found himself close to little Pepper, and the small man shouted in his ear:

"Sorry the lady showed herself. That's what sends them reds crazy. If she'd ha' stayed in whar she was they might ha' left us till mornin'. Can't knock sense into a gal, somehaow."

As he spoke he took a careful aim at an Indian who was galloping by behind his pony and sent a bullet into the knee of the rider, the only point exposed to view as he hung in the saddle.

The warrior dropped off on the other side of his pony and his friends made a rush toward him to cover his retreat; but from that moment the vigor of the attack grew less and less, till it faded away into silence once more, and Pepper drew a long breath and remarked:

"Naow, ef no more gals comes aout of that tent, we're safe to have a little rest till mornin'!"

"I wonder what the lady wanted?" he pursued meditatively, as he wiped out the chambers of his empty pistol and put in a fresh load. "It was that gal from the No'th, I reckon, as nigh as I c'd see. She don't look like one of the curi's kind, but she come out, for all the world, as ef she wanted to see some one."

Sol looked round here and saw that Major Rhett was going toward the tent, glancing back ever and anon, as if he feared a renewal of the attack. All was quiet, and he reached the tent and was seen to lift the flap and disappear inside.

A few minutes later he came out and crossed the corral to Sol, to whom he said rather stiffly:

"Cunnel Bigbee is inside thar, and he wants to speak to ye."

He spoke as if he did not like the message he had delivered, but his tone was perfectly polite.

Sol hesitated and said:

"I ain't quite fittin' the way I look to go in thar whar there's ladies, major. Will ye ask them to excuse me for havin' b'en in the river and bein' all muddy and mussed up?"

Rhett twitched his face impatiently.

"Oh, go in. No one thinks of looks at a time like this. The colonel has heard that you had come back and he wants to tell you something. The ladies, poor creatures, are thinking of anything in the world but the looks of men at a time like this."

Sol walked across the corral and knocked timidly at the flap of the tent, when the voice of Colonel Bigbee, sounding weak and strange, told him to enter.

He lifted the flap and found himself in a wall tent, in the midst of which lay the colonel, his head bound up in bloody bandages, his face pale from loss of blood, while the dressings on more than one part of his body showed that he had received severe hurts in the battle with the Indians.

All round the tent, crouched against the wall, in attitudes that denoted misery and fear, careless of appearances, were the ladies of the ranch, in all sorts of *dishabille*.

The only one fully dressed was Bessie Bell, who was kneeling by the side of the wounded man, fanning him.

It seemed to Sol, in the light of the fire which shone through the half-transparent canvas of the tent, that the color of this girl flickered sensibly as he came in; but he took no notice of her save to bow quietly, and ask Bigbee:

"Did you want to see me, cunnel?"

The wounded Texan turned his eyes on the giant, with a faint smile, as he said, in a low, weak tone:

"Yes, Piper, I did."

Then he had to stop for breath, and Sol waited till he should be able to resume his talk. The colonel made several efforts to speak, and at last pointed to his breast, whispering with a faint smile:

"Got it through the lungs, you know. Can't shout."

Sol started. It was the first time that he had known how severely his employer was hurt; and his face showed genuine sympathy as he said:

"God bless ye, cunnel. I hope it ain't going to be a bad hit."

Bigbee made a faint motion of dissent.

"No, no," he whispered; "it isn't so easy to kill a Texan. But it's a sharp call, and a close one, Sol. I wanted to see—see you."

Then, as well as he could, and with frequent stops for breath, he managed to get out what he wanted to say.

His conscience had been reproaching him for the way in which he had left the man who had saved his life in the power of the Mexicans, and he had repented of the words he had used to Pepper, about "one Yankee, more or less, not being missed."

"And I wanted to tell you, Piper," he said, "that if it was to do over again, I'd do different. You've changed my mind about Yanks, more than I believed possible. Thar's my little Yankee cousin, Miss Bell, she told me haow ye promised to bring me back; and ye did better than your word, for ye sent me back, and staid yourself. If we git aout of this muss we're in, naow, I'll do su'thin' for you; and you sha'n't regret comin' to Texas. That's all."

And the wounded man lay back on his blanket, with an air of exhaustion, that told how the effort to speak had taken the strength out of him.

Sol heard him with a feeling of pride that he could not repress, and when he looked round the tent and found that the eyes of the ladies were fixed on him, with an air of curiosity and interest that he had never seen there yet, he realized that his conquest of Texan prejudice was almost complete.

"I'm sure, cunnel," he said, slowly, "anything that I've done fur ye was done willingly; and because I'm not the man to go back on another man, whether he hails from North or South. I'll bid ye good-night, naow, and hope ye'll sleep well. The Injuns is gittin' ready to dust."

Bigbee shook his head slowly.

"Don't deceive yourself, Sol," he said. "When an Indian don't make a noise, he's planning more mischief. From the time we came into this corral, and they found we had ladies with us, I knew they wouldn't leave us, while thar was a chance. We've only got one left."

"And what is that, sir?" Sol could not help asking.

The Texan allowed a slight shade to cross his face as he said:

"It's the Yan— I mean the Federal soldiers. I never thought I'd have to rely on a Fed. to help me; but the time has come. Texas ain't what it used to be. The war took the spunk aout of us, I begin to think; and the time's coming when we'll have to let the soldiers do the fighting for us, while we sit still and look 'n. Keep your eyes skinned; and if the worst comes, I depend on you to *kill every woman in the corral, rather than let the Injuns git 'em alive*."

Sol looked round at the cowering women in the tent; and his voice trembled slightly, as he said:

"If they want me to do it, cunnel, I'll do it; but the worst ain't come; and they've got to kill all the white men here, afore it comes. Good-night, sir."

He raised the flap of the tent and was going out, when he felt a touch on his arm. A deep flush rose to his brow when he turned and found that it was the hand of Bessie Bell. The young lady was looking at him, her eyes filled with tears, as she whispered:

"No one has thanked you for what you have done for us all. God bless you for it. I am

proud that you and I come from the same part of the Union."

That was all; but there was something in the tone and in the expression of the face, that made Sol's heart beat hard; and it was noticeable that his quaint Yankee accent vanished entirely, as he answered her in a low voice:

"Miss Bell, God bless you, too. There are good men left in all parts of the country. Good-night."

And he was gone, while Bessie Bell catching the difference of his words from the countrified accent he usually employed, went back to her place by the wounded Texan without a word, but thinking deeply over the whole matter.

Then silence brooded over the besieged corral for the space of nearly an hour, at the end of which Bigbee was asleep, and the women, crouching in their misery by the sides of the tent, began to yield to the influence of fatigue and excitement, and to nod as they sat there. Bessie Bell ceased to fan the wounded man; and her head was drooping also, when every one was roused by a wild yell which broke in on the night air, followed by a burst of firing that showed the battle had begun again.

The noise increased every moment; and the cowboys outside began to shout excitedly to each other, for the first time since the siege had begun. Bigbee started awake; and as he listened he uttered a groan of apprehension, muttering to himself:

"They are giving way at last."

Then the firing outside rose into a rattling roar, and several bullets came pattering through the thin canvas of the tent, none of them striking any of the inmates, but coming close enough to make the women throw themselves flat down, and begin to scream.

The next moment came the thunder of horses' hoofs outside the corral, mingled with the yells of the charging Indians, and they heard the voice of Major Rhett shrieking excitedly:

"Stand fast, boys, for the honor of old Texas! Give it to 'em with the pistol!"

Then came a rattling fusillade, and the sound of a confused and desperate struggle.

Bessie Bell, pale as a corpse, crept to the door of the tent and peeped out, crouching to the ground as she did so.

The corral was full of men, struggling together like wild beasts, while the flashes of pistols and the gleam of knives showed that a hand-to-hand fight was going on. In the midst of all towered the figure of the Yankee giant, and he was mowing down the Indians with a huge saber and leaping from side to side, with wonderful agility.

As the girl looked out, the Indians raised a yell. They had seen her again, and rushed toward the tent.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PERILOUS RIDE.

THE attack of the Indians on the tent was resolute and desperate to the last degree; but the resistance of the cowboys was that of men who know they have nothing to hope for in defeat.

They seemed perfectly reckless of death or wounds, and stood up in the midst of the fight, firing their pistols with a deliberation and accuracy that dropped the red warriors like leaves in the fall of the year. They themselves were being shot down with a rapidity that promised to end the fight; but the way in which they stood up to their work was too much for even the overpowering numbers of the Indians.

The Yankee giant, who seemed to bear a charmed life, from the way in which he moved about the field, was the object of their especial fear, partly on account of his size and strength, but still more on account of his weapon, to which they were not used.

A sword is ordinarily thought but a poor weapon, in these days of revolvers; but a sword, as sharp as a razor, in the hands of a man like Solid Sol, can prove a fearful weapon.

The way he cut and slashed, taking off limbs at a single blow, and once nearly cutting a man in half, was an experience not often met with on the American continent, though it has been revived in the recent battles in Africa, between the Englishmen and the Mahdi.

All the resources of modern firearms, in the hands of the disciplined marksmen of Great Britain, proved unable to arrest the fanatical charge of the wild Arabs of the Soudan; and down in Texas the same causes produced like effects.

The Indians, who faced the cowboys boldly, shrunk from before the silent and deadly edge of the saber, in Sol's hands; and finally fled in confusion from the corral, actually leaving many of their dead behind them.

One reason for their flight, no doubt, was found in the fact that they were fighting on foot, a change which takes half the spirit out of a horse-Indian. At all events they fled; and the cowboys chased them to the bars, and poured a volley from their pistols into the backs of the fleeing savages, with a wild whoop of triumph.

Then Solid Sol heard a low murmur of gloom and apprehension going round among the men, who had fought so well a moment before; and

Pepper, who was close to him, said with a groan:

"Only one load left, Solid. Ef they come on again, our goose is cooked, for sart'in."

The fact could no longer be disguised; for the cowboys were going to and fro, hunting for powder; and before long it was noised about the corral that there was not enough ammunition left to give every man a full load for his pistols, while the rifle cartridges were exhausted.

The situation was grave; but the Indians had gone back for the time, and it was getting near dawn.

Major Rhett, with a gloomy frown on his face, stood in the middle of the corral, thoughtfully eying the ground. Even his pluck was beginning to fail him, at the prospect before them. The next assault the Indians made, was certain to succeed.

The young Yankee listened to all that the men round him said to each other, and made no remark, till he was near the major, when he asked slowly:

"Major, s'pose you had powder and lead, could ye hold out, think ye?"

Rhett glanced up at him, and his eye flashed for a moment, but then he shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"What's the use of talking? We haven't got it. If we had, we could stand off all the Indians in Texas; but as it is we've got to go."

"I don't see that," was the quiet reply. "Seems to me if a man could cut his way out, and scoot down to the fort he could git ammunition, even if there warn't a soldier there."

Rhett looked sharply up at him.

"The fort be hanged! If the men at the fort had done thar dooty we wouldn't be the way we air naow. The durned Yankee thieves are cookin' thar grub this very minute, 'most like, and laughin' at us pore devils of ranchers gittin' chawed up."

"I don't think you're right, major," replied Sol, in the same quiet tone. "You found out that you had wronged one Yank, you remember, and it's jest possible you may be wrongin' some more naow. From all I kin hear, the soldiers from the fort have been off scaoutin' up the river, or we should have heard of them before. If no one else dares go for ammunition I'll do it myself."

Rhett stared at him, and then cast an apprehensive glance round through the darkness at the Indians.

The fire from the buildings had burned down so far that the outlines of things on the prairie could no longer be seen, and the darkness was growing more intense every minute.

"Any man that goes outside this corral takes his life in his hand," he said, sullenly. "You know that as well as I do. The Indians are pretty sure to catch him, and ef they do, good-by to him."

Sol laid his hand on the Texan's shoulder.

"When I said I was willing to go after ammunition I thought of all that, major. I am willing to go now, but if I take the risk I want you to do something for me."

Rhett looked curiously at him in the thickly gathering darkness.

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

"I want you to promise me that if I get wiped out you'll never say a Yankee isn't as good as a Southerner," said Sol, slowly. "I've stood it long enough, major. You have had to admit that I'm no coward, and you'll have to say the same about the rest, too."

Rhett was silent for a little time; then he suddenly put out his hand and grasped that of the Yankee with a heartiness that showed he meant what he said.

"I've known as good Yankees as ever stepped in shoe-leather, and if you ain't one of the best of them I don't know who is," he said. "If you manage to scrape through and bring us help, I'll say you're the best man in Texas; and you can't ask more of a man that was born thar. Is that enough?"

"Yes," was the brief answer.

And then Solid Sol walked over to where the big mule was standing, looking as sleepy, with her long ears laid forward and her head drooping, as if she had never had a trace of vice in her composition.

"Open the gate, boys," said the Yankee, in a low voice. "I'm going to make a dash for it. Say your prayers after I'm gone, and don't forget me in them. If you never said them before, it won't do any harm now. If I git back, I'll bring help of some sort."

Then he rode quietly to the gate, which was thrown open for his exit, and walked the mule gently out into the thick darkness that prevailed outside.

He had heard from the cowboys that Indians are afraid to move in the dark, and that all escapes that had ever been made from their clutches had been made by running away in the shelter of night. He had resolved to try if the theory was true of which he had heard so much.

Certainly, after he had got out everything was as quiet as if there had not been an Indian round the corral. It was the darkest time of all, that comes just before dawn, and the effect

of the loss of light from the burning building added to the obscurity.

He knew the general direction of the fort and headed the mule straight for it. The fort, as he knew, was not more than ten miles away from the ranch, and he hoped to find some traces of soldiers there, if only enough to carry the ammunition through.

For several hundred yards he met nothing, and then a figure rose from the earth, in front of his mule, and demanded in Spanish:

"Who is it?"

Sol had been prepared for this, and his only reply was to give the mule a prod with the end of the saber, which he had never relinquished all this time.

The vicious beast gave a wild squeal, and dashed right at the man who had challenged her rider, snatching at him with her teeth with the ferocity of a bull-dog. The Indian uttered a yell of warning as he sprung back, and in a moment dozens of forms sprung up, as if rising out of the ground, and ran to intercept the mule. But she was not to be stopped by anything short of a bullet, and made her way through the midst of them, with great bounds, squealing and kicking like a fiend all the way, Sol slashing with his sword on all sides of him, and sweeping through the midst of them with an ease that surprised himself as much as the men he had surprised.

Once clear, he stretched away at full speed toward the fort, hearing the patter of hoofs behind, that told he was being pursued, though so thick was the darkness, that the Indians did not venture to fire a shot, for fear of hitting their own men.

In ten minutes from the time he had been challenged he felt quite secure against all his followers, and only had one dread, that the Indians might be outlying somewhere, and would try to intercept him in his way to the fort.

But as minute after minute passed, and still no form rose in the darkness against him, he began to relax his pace a little, and just as the first gray streak of dawn shone in the east behind him, he spied a light ahead, which he knew, from the direction, could only be the fort.

He had been there before, and knew that the fort was one of the few relics of the old Mexican occupation, which had regular walls and ditches, and was capable of being defended against all the Indians of the plains by a comparatively small force. He drew a long breath as he saw the light, and his heart beat high with hope. He had but a mile or two more to go, and would be able to rouse the people and get help before daylight, in all probability.

Broader and broader grew the light in the east, and he was just beginning to distinguish the outlines of distant mountains against the sky-line, when he heard the rumbling that told of coming horses, and caught sight of several rapidly-moving figures, right ahead of him, crossing his path. He swerved from his own direction to avoid them; but the moving figures changed direction at the same time, and Sol set his teeth, seeing that there was no alternative but a fight, and rode right at the strangers.

As he came near them, he was surprised to hear a voice shouting, in English:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

The Yankee pulled up his mule, with a shout of joy.

"By gum, it's the soldiers at last!" he cried. "Where have ye b'en all this time, gentlemen, with the Injuns scoutin' all over the durned country, playing the devil's delights? Who air ye, and whar d'ye come from, to be sure?"

"Answer my question!" was the reply, in a tone of anger that showed Sol he was suspected. "Advance carbines, men, and fire on him if he offers to stir. I'll come and investigate you, my fine fellow."

And with that a figure approached Sol.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MATTER OF MINUTES.

THE new-comer proved to be a sharp young officer, with a great idea of his own importance, who came up to Sol with a revolver in his hand, cocked and leveled, while he hastily demanded:

"Now, then, give an account of yourself, my fine fellow. I don't take any nonsense, I can tell you. Offer to stir, and I'll shoot you, as quick as I would a coyote."

The light was strong enough now for Sol to distinguish the face of this young man; and the giant laughed as he said:

"Waal, lieutenant, seems to me it ain't manners to go pokin' pistols into men's faces, when they hain't done ye no harm."

"Then tell who you are, at once, and no equivocation about it," cried the now thoroughly angry young man, who thought the big fellow was laughing at him.

Sol smiled.

"I will, if ye'll give me time, lieutenant. I'm Solid Sol Piper, from Mesquite Ranch, and I've come to the fort to ax for help. The Injuns has b'en raidin' all round us, and swept all the county, besides burnin' Cunnel Bigbee's house to the ground. The men on the ranch is holdin' out, in the corral; and they hain't got

but one round more of ammunition left; so I come to git more. That's *who* I am, and why I come here, lieutenant."

The officer eyed him suspiciously.

"A likely story! We have just got back from a scout up the river, where they swore that the reds were as thick as blackberries in July; and we haven't found so much as a lodge-pole trail. How am I to know that you are telling the truth? We have heard no firing; and as for fires and burning houses, I don't believe it, and that's flat. If a house had been burned, last night, I should have been sure to have known it, of all men."

Solid Sol looked at the young officer with a curious expression.

"Waal, I must say, lieutenant," he remarked, "that you've got about the poorest manners of any man I ever seen; and yet you come from the North, too, if I ain't mistook?"

"What do you mean?" asked the officer, haughtily. "Yes, of course I come from the North, sir, and from West Point, too, I'd have you know."

Sol laughed openly.

"Waal, ef that's the sort of pups they raise at the Point, I don't hanker arter 'em," he said. "Here I've jest ridden over, and had to cut my way through the Injuns, to git here. There's a number of ladies, all in a tent, and the Injuns is all round 'em, and will have 'em, sure, if they ain't took out of the scrape they're in; and here you tell me they ain't no sich thing at all, and that there ain't no Injuns round here. I tell ye, lieutenant, the Injuns has fooled you soldiers out of your eyes. They sent ye off on a wild-goose chase up the river, where there ain't one of 'em, and in the mean time they've been playin' old gooseberry down here. All I ask ye to do, is to take me to your head officer, whoever he be. Maybe he knows more than you do about Injuns. I want ammunition for the boys, and we don't ask you to send a soldier, if ye don't want to do it. But if *something* ain't done, and done mighty quick, too, the hull b'ilin' will be spiled."

The young officer seemed to be somewhat struck by the earnestness of Sol's manner, for he answered more politely:

"I can't see how I can be mistaken. I have been out on scouting duty, all night; and if there had been a fire in sight, I should have been sure to have seen it. But I have seen nothing."

"Which direction have ye b'en scoutin'?" asked Sol, quietly.

The question again touched the dignity of the youngster, and he answered haughtily:

"What's that to you? Here, I've had enough of your impudence, my fine fellow. You come along with me to the fort, and Colonel Digby can question you, if he pleases."

"That's jest what I'm wishin' fur," said Sol, quietly. "I want to see a man that *knows what he's about*, lieutenant. The quicker you take me thar, the better I'll like it."

He thought he heard a sort of smothered snicker from one of the cavalry soldiers, riding with the young man, and the face of the youthful commander flushed, while his voice trembled with passion, as he said:

"You shall find out that I know enough to take down the impudence of such fellows as you."

Then, turning to his escort, he said sharply:

"Two of you ride with this fellow, on either side; and if he offers to make a motion to escape, shoot him on the spot."

Solid Sol actually laughed aloud at the threat.

"When I try to *escape*, as you call it, you kin shoot me and welcome. If you was any sort of a man, or a scout, you'd know the country was full of Injuns, and that I am a white man. Go ahead, lieutenant, and the sooner we git to the fort, the better for the ladies."

But the young man had already turned his horse and was riding toward the fort, while two of the soldiers, who were following—the whole party numbering about a dozen men—took their places on either side of the strange Yankee, with their carbines advanced, it is true; but with a covert grin on their faces, that showed they had not much respect for the young officer in front.

Within a short time after, when the flush of dawn had broadened and deepened into crimson, and the birds were beginning to chirp from the lone grass, the little party rode up in front of Fort San Carlos, as the place was named, and Sol heard the buglesounding reveille within the inclosure.

As he rode into the open parade-ground of the fort, surrounded with buildings, the soldiers were streaming out of the barracks on either side, half awake and rubbing their eyes; while several officers were moving about from place to place, watching the progress of the sergeants with their roll-calls; and a man in his shirt-sleeves was standing at the door of a cottage, in front of which a flag-pole announced the quarters of the commanding officer, partly engaged in wiping his hands on a towel, and partly in watching the whole business, in a manner that showed him to be a sharp disciplinarian.

Sol had seen the gentleman in the shirt-sleeves

before, and had heard him mentioned as "Colonel Digby of the new cavalry regiment, that had been raised since the war, and sent to Texas for service." He was said to be a sharp old man—the colonel was about fifty—who had served in the militia before the war; had won distinction in active service; and had been promoted over the heads of a good many West Pointers, when hostilities closed.

Colonel Digby was a stout man, with a gray mustache and a square jaw beneath it. He had a strident voice and a harsh manner, which were both displayed when he saw the young officer who had been on scouting duty.

The colonel eyed him sharply; but said nothing till he saw that the young man was going to his quarters, before reporting, when he roared, in tones that were heard all over the parade-ground:

"Mr. Greene!"

Mr. Greene turned red at the summons, but turned his face toward his commanding officer, and saluted; when the colonel shouted:

"What the deuce are you standing there for, sir? Why don't you come up and report? Don't you young fellows know anything, or are you too conceited to learn? Come here, sir, this instant."

Mr. Greene colored and obeyed, when a short colloquy took place between him and the colonel in tones that were not audible beyond the immediate vicinity of the head-quarters. Then Mr. Greene, with a face much longer than it had been when he went away, returned to Sol and said in a sulky way:

"The colonel wants to see you, my man."

Sol followed him to the presence of the commanding officer, who scanned his figure keenly, and demanded in a voice as different from that in which he had addressed the officer as it was possible to imagine:

"Where do you come from, my friend?"

"From Mesquite Ranch, sir," was the prompt reply; for Sol saw that he had a man to deal with who would believe what he said. "The Indians made a raid and swept off half the cattle in the county yesterday night, sir, and came back last night for the rest of them. They got me over into Mexico and I made my escape last night. When I got back they were all round Bigbee's Ranch, and the ladies were in a tent round the corral. The Injuns were beaten off twice, but the men were almost out of ammunition when I came away. All we want is cartridges, and if the men don't git them within an hour from now, if the Injuns make another attack, it's my impression they are gone up."

Digby listened closely and inquired in the same quiet way:

"When did you meet Mr. Greene here?"

"About half an hour ago, sir. He wouldn't believe my story because he hadn't seen the blaze of the ranch-house which they burned last night; but if you want to go there and see for yourself you'll find enough Indians to take half the men you've got, if not more."

The colonel nodded in an absent sort of way as he listened, and then turned on Greene with a sudden change of manner that was noticeable as he broke out, beginning in a low voice, but rising to a roar before he finished:

"Well, sir, and what have you to say to all this? You are supposed to have come from the best military academy in this country; you have received your education at the expense of the nation, and put on more airs, by heavens, than men who have seen more battles than you have hairs on your head. Yet here you are, sent out on a scout to find if there are any Indians round us and, by heavens, you come back here and report that there is not one in the country, when the whole place is full of them, and the infernal thieves are murdering and robbing within ten miles of the gates of this very fort. What sort of an officer do you call yourself, and what do you suppose the Government gave you all your education for? Go to your quarters at once, in arrest, and stay there till I tell the adjutant to release you."

He ended his scolding with his face red with anger, and the mortified young man compressed his lips and saluted stiltly before he walked off to his quarters in disgrace.

Then Colonel Digby shouted:

"Adjutant! Adjutant! Where is Mr. Sankey?"

A smart-looking officer with a waxed mustache and unexceptionable attire here came out of a neighboring cottage as calmly as if nothing had happened and asked:

"What is it, colonel?"

"Order out four companies to be ready in ten minutes to go down the river to the Mesquite Ranch and drive off the Indians," said the colonel, briefly.

And then he turned to Sol with a kindness in marked contrast to his previous harshness, and began to question him as to the number of Indians and how the thing had happened, while, from words he let drop, Sol found that the whole force at his disposal had been engaged in a fruitless scout up the river, in which they had fatigued their horses to no purpose and had not seen an Indian in the course of the expedition.

The scouts that had been at the disposal of the troops immediately after the war, frequent-

ly gave false information and wasted the force of the regiments in just such expeditions; so that the colonel was at his wits' end to know whom to believe; and, while he felt that he could not fairly be blamed for the raid of the Indians, yet was sure that the ranchers of the neighborhood, who detested the troops for having belonged to the force which had overthrown the late Confederacy, would lose no opportunity of complaining against him, for what they would describe as his "neglect of duty."

But within the time the colonel had named, the four companies he had called for were ready in the inclosure of the fort; and when Solid Sol rode out, the sun had just cleared the edge of the prairie, and two hundred armed cavalymen were riding with him to the rescue of the beleaguered defenders of the Mesquite Ranch.

They took a trot at once, and did their best to cover the ground that lay between them and the scene of hostilities in the shortest space of time; but with all their hurry, ten miles is a long stretch, and when they came in sight of the Mesquite Ranch, the smoke that ascended from the ruins of the ranch-house was the only evidence of what had been done.

The plain all around the corral was empty of moving forms; the cattle had vanished; the men in the corral had gone with them; and all they found on the scene of the late fight was the burned bodies of a few men who seemed to have been killed at their posts, while a broad trail that led to the river, trampled with the hoofs of horses, showed the track of the raiders.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A HOT SCENT.

THE officer in command of the cavalymen was a man of caution, and had but lately come to the frontier. He had fought civilized foes many a time; but had little experience of Indians, and was proportionately chary of following them closely, for fear of "running into an ambush." When he found that the corral had been captured before he came up, and that the Indians had gone, he drew rein, and said to Sol:

"Sorry we came so late; but I don't see what we are to do. The Indians have gone across the river by this time, and we can't follow them into Mexican territory."

Sol pointed to the broad trail, as he said:

"That's the way they've gone, and if we follow them we kin hardly help ketchin' 'em at the crossin'. They didn't take the corral without a fight, you kin bet, and why should they have gone away, if they hadn't known the soldiers was coming? If ye won't take it ill to be advised, I'd say follow the trail wherever it leads, and don't let the Injuns laugh at us."

Captain Brisbane shook his head, with a supercilious smile.

"I believe I command these troops," was all the answer he deigned to make to the Yankee, who had presumed to advise him.

But he ordered out a skirmish-line, and began a cautious advance on the trail of the Indians, while the men, bolder than their commander, trotted on rapidly, and within half an hour from the time they had struck the ruins of the burned ranch, came in sight of the river, and beheld, ahead of them, a great crowd of Indians, with a herd of cattle and horses, round which they were riding, trying to force them into the river, to cross to the other side.

The spectacle produced such an effect on the soldiers that their ardor could not be restrained, and they started on a charge, the skirmish-line ahead, Sol himself urging his big mule to a speed that soon brought him into the midst of the Indians.

As he rode, he saw, somewhat to his surprise, that the Indians, contrary to their usual custom, had not killed their captives. Quite a knot of men and women were gathered together near the bank; but as soon as the Indians saw the soldiers, he heard a wild yell, and saw them ride at the captives with the object of exterminating them before the arrival of the troops should take away their only chance of vengeance.

What happened for the next few minutes was like a dream to the excited Yankee. He was sensible of the rattling of shots, the whistling of bullets; saw the Indians coming to meet him; felt himself in the midst of them, striking on all sides; heard the rapid gallop of horses, that told of the arrival of the cavalymen, and was in the midst of a chance medley fight, in which Indians, soldiers, captives and beasts were all in a tangle of inextricable confusion.

When he came to his senses he found himself on foot, standing by the dead mule, that had carried him so far, and the soldiers firing into the river, where the Indians were crossing in confusion, while the shrieks of women told him that one or more of them were being hurt near him.

The sound struck him like a whip, and he rushed in the direction from which it proceeded, where he saw a confused knot of struggling men, by the banks of the river, soldiers and Indians mingled together, into which he dashed.

In the midst of all he recognized the golden curls of Bessie Bell, as the girl, on her knees, with the hand of an Indian in her long stream-

ing hair, was struggling to keep the savage from striking her with his knife. She had clung to his arm, screaming, and in the desperation of her situation, was actually coping with the warrior, who could not extricate his arm.

The giant uttered a roar of rage, and swept like a tornado through the struggling groups, cutting on every side.

The Indian, who was surrounded with enemies, but still seemed intent on nothing but the death of the captive, had snatched his arm away at last, by the exercise of all his strength, and had bent back the head of the girl to strike the fatal blow, when the saber of the Yankee giant descended, and clove the warrior's head in two from behind, so that he dropped like a log, and lay dead by the fainting Bessie.

Then Sol sprang to her side, and raised her inanimate form in his arms, where he stood, supporting it, waving his saber like a guardian angel, while the fight raged round him, and he became sensible that the soldiers were not fighting Indians alone, but that quite a number of Mexicans were mixed up with the red-men in such a manner as to leave no doubt that they were allies.

The shouts of the combatants were dying away in the distance, as the soldiers chased the few Indians that were left, on the north bank of the Rio Grande, into the water; while the Indians in the river fired back to defend their retreat, in the best way they knew how. Bessie was still insensible, and Sol, with a strange feeling of despair tugging at his heart, as he looked at her lifeless face, was wondering whether all the rest of the women had been killed when he heard the voice of Pepper close to him, and the little cowboy, in a voice choking with sobs, said:

"Oh, Solid Sol, Solid Sol, ye came too late, ye came too late!"

The words were dismal enough; but they came from one whom Sol knew, and he eagerly turned his head to see little Pepper, his face all covered with blood, another stream flowing from his breast, lying on the ground, close by the body of a dead Indian, and looking up at his friend mournfully.

"What's happened, Pepper, and how did it come about?" he asked, as well as he could speak for grief and excitement. "Have the Indians killed all the ladies?"

Pepper shook his head wearily.

"Might have b'en as well if they had. We might better have done it ourselves, for that matter. But it warn't to be, Sol. Arter you went, they found it aout, and come on us, all on a sudden, at the break of day, as if they knowed we hadn't got another cartridge. They didn't make no rush. They was too sure fur that. The durned Alcalde of Candeliero come ahead."

"Don Rafael!" cried Sol. "Was he with them?"

"Ay, ay," said Pepper feebly; "if he hadn't, they wouldn't have done it. He come in with a flag of truce, and promised that, if we would give up to the Republic of Mexico, and not to the Injuns, he would save the lives of all hands, and have us held to ransom. Major Rhett, he allowed that he'd trust him; and the end of it was the Greasers come in, and took away aour arms. Then they took us down to the river, and was crossin' when the soldiers come. Now, all the soldiers in Texas can't git what ladies was left; for they're over the river, and no one won't never see 'em, no more."

Sol Piper threw back his head proudly, as he retorted:

"If the Mexicans have them, I'll get them back yet. Only tell me which of them is there?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

A DESOLATE SITUATION.

THE news given to Sol by the sorely-wounded Pepper was only too true. What the Indians, alone, could not have done, the Mexican bandits, in league with them, had accomplished; and the hard-pressed Texans had yielded, when they could no longer resist, on the express promise of having their lives saved, and being admitted to ransom. It is barely possible that, had the crossing of the river been unopposed, the Mexicans might have secured their prisoners in Candeliero and persuaded their Indian allies to forego the pleasure of torturing the whole of them, for the sake of the ransom that some were able to pay.

But the sudden coming of the troops, and the apprehension that all would be taken from them, added to the naturally savage tastes of the red-men, had led to an indiscriminate massacre of the prisoners, at the side of the river. Of the little band that had survived the defense of the corral, only Pepper, Curley Pink and Bessie Bell were left alive, on the northern side of the river.

Colonel Bigbee and Major Rhett had disappeared, said to have been carried off along with the women of the party; and the only news obtainable of their fate, was that the Indians had been seen carrying some of them across the river.

Bessie Bell had only been saved from the same fate by the accident of having been on a horse,

along with a Mexican, whose mount having been shot at the first assault of the soldiers, the animal, in falling, had crushed the leg of the man, while the girl had been able to make her escape under the feet of the other horses, as if by a miracle, overlooked in the hurry of the fight, till the soldiers were all mixed up with the Indians and Mexicans in the confusion of the battle.

Of the cavalymen, several had been killed, for the Indians had fought well for the first few minutes of the charge; but the survivors were full of excitement, and anxious to pursue, even to the extent of crossing the river.

They would have gone over, too, on the heels of the Indians; but the cautious captain forbid anything of the sort, and sent back to the fort for orders, while the men stood by the bank, watching the Indians on the further side of the river, who were riding up and down, waving their flags and lances, defying them to cross and trying to coax them into doing so, to all appearance.

Bessie Bell, who had been stunned by a blow of the Indian's fist, and completely exhausted by her struggle for life, was restored to her senses, and when she found herself in the arms of the young Yankee giant, shuddered violently, and said, almost in the same words that Pepper had used:

"You came too late; you came too late!"

Sol took her a little to one side, out of the sight of the men, who were staring curiously at her, and drew from her a more connected account of what had happened than he had been able to obtain from Pepper, who had been desperately wounded, and was fast sinking from loss of blood.

She told him that she and the other ladies, at the time of the surrender, had feared the worst, as they were led out; but when they found that they were assigned to Mexicans, to be carried off, and not to Indians, they had begun to entertain hopes that the compact would be kept.

"There was a man called Don Rafael," she told him, "who was the chief, to all seeming, and treated us very civilly. He told us we had nothing to fear from the great Republic of Mexico, and that the Mexicans loved the Americans, ever since the great Republic had helped the Mexicans to chase from their soil the barbarian French invaders, and the Austrian usurper who had been shot to death at Queretaro. We trusted him; he seemed so civil, and was so sweet in all his words. The Indians let the Mexicans take the advance, while they occupied themselves in gathering up all the stock that was near the ranch-house. They even had a litter made for my poor cousin, and had him carried toward the river, with care and apparent tenderness. The first news we had that all was not right, was when an Indian came riding in from up the river with his horse all in a foam, and told the chief something or other that seemed to make him angry. He rode up to Don Rafael and said something to him, in their language, at which the Mexican seemed to be frightened, for I saw him remonstrating with the chief, and both seemed to be excited. I think it must have been the news that the soldiers were coming after us: for there was a great hurry, and our horses were urged to the utmost, while the Indians began to drive up the stock and take it to the river, as hard as they could make the cattle and horses run. The Mexican chief said something to his men, and they got the prisoners together in a mass, and began to urge their horses also. After that we were all in a tremor of fear and excitement, not knowing what was going to happen; till the Indians in the rear began to yell, and then we heard the first shots that your men sent after us. From that moment all was confusion. I only thought of one thing, that, if I was going to be killed, I wanted to have it done on this side of the river. I did not want to be taken to Mexico. I don't know why I felt it; but so it was. Then the horse I was being carried on stumbled and fell, with the man under him, and there was a great confusion. I don't know what happened, but I know that I got up and ran like a wild thing into the midst of the horses, trying to get out somewhere, and screaming all the time, I suppose. The next thing I knew I was struggling with a savage, who was trying to take my scalp, and then I got a blow that stunned me; and when I came to, you were here, and I was safe. But poor Clara! poor Clara Nunez!"

"What of her?" asked Sol, gravely. "Do you think the Indians got her, or did she get taken by a Mexican?"

Bessie shuddered.

"She was mounted behind the Mexican chief; that is all I know. But what will become of her?"

Sol could make her no answer; for the tale of the unhappy captives, carried off into Mexican territory by Indians or their allies, was notoriously a matter about which little hope could be entertained. Indeed, the fate of poor Bessie herself, left as she was, all alone in the midst of a number of men, the house where she had been living a heap of ruins, her relatives killed, with no one of her own sex near her to comfort her, was sufficiently pitiable; and the heart of the

Yankee giant bled within him, as he looked at her, and thought of what could be done for her.

But Captain Brisbane, though not a commander who dared to take the responsibility of following the Indians, was at least a gentleman who knew what to do when there were ladies present; and he soon made his appearance in the midst of his men, and approaching the young lady, told her that if she would commit herself to the protection of his men, he would have her taken to the fort, where there were several married officers, whose wives were with them, and where she could be taken care of, till she could find some conveyance to her friends.

The captain was surprised, when the young lady absolutely declined to go to the fort and told him:

"I have heard too much from my cousin in his last moments about what *might* have been, if you gentlemen at the fort had done your duty by this neighborhood, to wish to trust myself in your protection. I will stay with Mr. Piper, here, if he will take me to the nearest ranch, where I can be sheltered till I can write to my friends at Philadelphia, and go home to them."

Brisbane drew himself up, offended at her words, and said coldly:

"Very well, if you prefer it, madam. But it is my duty to tell you that there is not a ranch in this neighborhood where you would be as safe as in the fort, and that, I imagine, is the first consideration with a lady in your condition."

"Not quite," she answered, with a flash of her eye. "There are others whose rescue you have refused to undertake; but, whom this gentleman is willing to try and rescue. All I ask from you is to let us have one of the horses that are running loose round the field, that we may go away from here."

This the captain was quite willing to do, and very soon Sol was taking the young lady from the field, toward the ranch of Don Sancho Agostino, where he knew she could be sheltered and cared for, with all the hospitality of the Spanish-speaking races, till she could find a safe conveyance to her friends in Philadelphia.

They reached the Hacienda Agostino by noon.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PLANNING RECOVERY.

THE decision came to by Bessie Bell to take refuge at the house of Don Sancho had not been taken without advice from Sol Piper.

The young Yankee knew that Don Sancho was full of gratitude to him, for having warned him in time of the coming of the Indians, and for the way in which he had saved his stock from their incursion.

He knew that inside the hacienda, fortified as it was with high walls, the girl would be as safe as in the fort, while he had been maturing a scheme all the time he had been on the field, by which he hoped yet to make some terms with the Mexicans on the opposite side of the river for the release of the captives.

Sol knew that the Mexicans and Indians were in league to a certain extent, and he knew, also, that the Indians from the Mexican side had more animosity against the Texan whites than they had against the Mexican-born inhabitants of the State.

He knew that, with a force of Mexicans, if he could find any who had courage enough to follow him, he might succeed in penetrating to the village of Candelero, when he would have found the whole country swarming with foes, had he made the same attempt with Texans or soldiers. Moreover, he saw that there was no chance of getting the soldiers to follow him, for they did not dare to violate the territory of a friendly nation, as Mexico was at the time, for fear of complications which might bring them into trouble at Washington.

If Clara Nunez was to be brought back, dead or alive, the expedition to get her must be composed of private citizens, with no soldiers. At the ranch of Don Sancho Agostino, he hoped to find enough Mexicans to follow him, and fight as well as they could be expected to fight, though such valor as had been exhibited by his dead friends, the cowboys, was not to be expected from the race.

Therefore he was pleased when he reached the hacienda, and still more pleased when he noticed the delicate courtesy with which poor Bessie Bell was received by the old Don, who bowed to the ground when he met her, and insisted that "his house and all therein was at her disposal entirely, as long as she wished it."

Don Sancho had two daughters, Carmelita and Pepita, who were so much excited and pleased at the visit of an "Americana," that they welcomed Bessie with effusion; and if such a thing had been possible, would have made her forget all the troubles she had suffered. The warm-hearted Spanish girls had been used, all their lives, to being looked down on by the American-born Texans, who could see no good in a "Greaser girl," as some of them openly called the dark-eyed beauties. The change to a young lady who spoke to them with gratitude, and as if they were her equals, was so pleasant, that

they could hardly do enough for the fair-haired stranger, who had been brought to them under such circumstances.

Sol had always been disposed to like the Mexicans, whom he had seen exposed to all sorts of insults from the Texans, in the days before the raid, when they thought themselves lords of all they surveyed, and were determined to drive every "Greaser" and every "Yank" out of the country, if they could do so without coming into contact with the arm of the law that was ready to be invoked against them at any time, if they got too full of their nice little tricks.

Now that the tables were turned, and that all the Texans in that part of the county had come to grief, while the ranches in which they had taken such pride had been totally desolated; the Yankee giant found the advantage that accrued to him from having made friends with the Mexican *vaqueros*, in the days when they were the only friends that he could make, and when all the native Texans, of the white stock, had looked on him with dislike and suspicion. Had it been left to him, at that moment, to go out among the neighboring ranches, and try to organize an expedition of Texan cowboys, he knew that he would have had trouble to get any of them to follow him, if they suspected—and he could not hide the fact—that he came from the North.

But the Mexicans had been his friends, and the only trouble he would have with them was to imbue them with the necessary courage to follow him. The news of his exploits on the other side of the river had spread with marvelous rapidity through that part of the county, however; and the same men who would not have dared to think of crossing the river on their own responsibility, volunteered eagerly as soon as they heard that they would be led by the "Gringo Giant," who threw steers with his bare hands, and who had overcome Indians without so much as a knife.

The second day after his arrival at the hacienda of Don Sancho, Sol rode out of the enclosure of the ranch-house, with a following of more than a hundred Mexicans from all parts of the county, in the most splendid dresses, and armed with the best weapons they had been able to procure in Texas. They were not like the Mexicans on the other side of the border, confined to old brass *escopetas*, and swords which they could not get near enough to use; but had the latest patterns of revolvers and rifles, and some of them knew how to use them, almost as well as a cowboy.

By this time the name of "Solid Sol," by which the once tramp had been familiarly known among the cowboys of the neighborhood, had given place to the more sonorous and dignified Spanish appellation of Don Solano de la Pipa, by which he was to be known, thereafter, throughout the county of Mesquite.

Bessie Bell, who had been treated in the hacienda with a kindness that had almost made her forget all her losses, saw him depart, and bid him farewell with words that he never forgot.

"I depend on you to find poor Clara and bring her back to us, if she is alive. I have lost my cousin, and all I held dear but her. She, I know, has always hated a Northern person; but, if you can only show her that they are the same as Southerners, and make her respect them, you will find a great difference in her. The crust that hides all her good qualities is but a crust; and if you can get under it, you will find her just as good as any girl that ever came from New Hampshire. We have a good deal to learn, both in the North and South, before we are perfect. Bring her back, and ask anything you wish. I shall never forget what you have done for me and mine."

Don Solano—as he must be called henceforth while among the Mexicans—colored deeply as he replied:

"I do nothing for the sake of reward, Miss Bell; but if the time should come when I was willing to claim the reward you have been good enough to offer me, I might claim something which you might be unwilling to grant."

There was something in the tone of his voice and look of his eye that brought the color to her cheek also; but she answered quickly:

"I never break my word, Don Solano. What you claim you shall have, if you bring back my Cousin Clara, alive and unhurt."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DON RAFAEL BALDERAMOS.

DON RAFAEL BALDERAMOS was seated on his *azotea*, a few days after the raid which had had such a successful termination for the Indians, and his face wore an aspect of ill-humor that did not belie his feelings.

Opposite to him, squatted cross-legged on the same roof, sat the bowed form of old Geronimo, the chief of the Chiricahuas; while the crafty face of the chief's son was looking at the Mexican alcalde, with a grin full of insolence, as the young man said, to emphasize something just spoken by his father:

"That is true, Don Rafael. If we choose we can take you, and all the men of Candelero, and have our own way, without asking any favors. You have helped us, to help yourself; but we

had to do the fighting, and we are not going to be cheated out of our reward."

Don Rafael's eyes flashed, but there was a timid expression in his yellow face, at the same time, and he did not dare to meet Geronimo's glance. So he held down his head, and looked out over the river toward the Texan bank, as he said slowly:

"I don't know that any one has talked of cheating you; but at the same time, without us, you would not have been able to take a single prisoner. They surrendered to us, and they are ours. Besides, why should we quarrel? If the ransom is paid, you will have your share; and that is better for your people, who are poor and live up in the mountains, than the pleasure of burning a few people to death, and getting nothing for it."

Old Geronimo laughed.

"You are wrong. We get a good deal for it. What is a ransom of a few dollars, or a herd of ponies? That will not give us the pleasure that comes from looking at a white warrior who has defied us for years, and hearing him howl for mercy. You do not know what fun it is to light a fire and dance round it, while a white man dances *inside of it* for your amusement. When I think of it, I am almost tempted to say that it is worth thousands of dollars, and that a herd of ponies, a hundred strong, cannot give half as much pleasure."

The Mexican shuddered slightly. Cruel and cold-blooded as he was, yet he had not got to the pitch of torturing prisoners to death; and it had been a positive instinct of humanity that had made him give his protection to the white captives of the Mesquite Ranch, besides the avaricious idea that he might get a handsome ransom out of their friends, and so repay himself for that which Sol had cheated him out of a few days before.

"I don't see what pleasure *that* can be," he said, uneasily. "It is soon over, whereas the herd of ponies will last you for years."

Young Geronimo laughed like his father.

"That is because you are not a red-man, alcalde. There are moments of pleasure that are so great that they outweigh years of tame stagnation. Whatever happens, we will not be satisfied unless we have the men we took prisoners to torture."

"But you have only one of them who is unwounded," said the alcalde.

Old Geronimo laughed again.

"We will take care of the rest and cure their wounds. There is no fun in torturing a man who is half-dead already. The exquisite pleasure lies in seeing him struggle, in the full flush of health and strength, and in watching him gradually sink under the torture. All the wealth of the Yanquis will not give greater pleasure than we can get out of a few such men. And as for the women—"

"As for them," was the resolute reply of the alcalde, "the Republic of Mexico will not permit you to torture them, at any rate."

Young Geronimo laughed a third time.

"No one wants to torture them. They are meant to be taken to our lodges in the mountains, and given for wives to our chiefs and warriors. I myself have chosen the black-eyed one that they call Clara. She will make a fine figure in my lodge, and will cook none the worse for me, after she has learned that we are the real lords of this country."

The alcalde glanced at him in a peculiar way, as he said:

"But suppose that I should want the girl myself; what then? I have the disposal of the prisoners, for you would never have taken them if they had not surrendered to me."

Old Geronimo curled his lip.

"We are on the south side of the river, where the Chiricahuas is the lord, alcalde," he said, sententiously. "What we want we will have, and all the men you have in Candelero are not enough, as you are aware, to stop us if we are determined on anything."

The alcalde shivered slightly as he heard the chief speak. He had gone into the alliance with them with his eyes open, and knew well that he could not depend on his men, if the Chiricahuas chose to make a serious fight over it. They had consented to let him take the surrender of the Texans, because they knew that the soldiers were very near, and that there was a strong risk of losing the whole spoil if they did not get the prisoners to the river before the arrival of the troops. They had done what no Indians had been known to do before—shown mercy to a captive for a time; but they fully intended to cheat the alcalde, as soon as they got him in a place where there was no danger of the "Yanquis" coming in on them. They thought that, once across the river, the soldiers would not dare to follow, and that they had only to cow the Alcalde of Candelero and his men to have everything their own way.

Therefore, when old Geronimo made his threat openly, the alcalde shivered and looked away across the river for the sake of avoiding an answer till he had time to think.

It was while he was looking that way that he saw a single horseman coming from the river bearing a white flag, and his eyes brightened, as he said:

"What is the use of quarreling? Here comes a messenger now, from the other side of the river, with a flag. He has come to treat for a ransom of some of the prisoners. Let us, at least, receive him, and then we can get the reward, and talk about cheating the Yanquis when we get their money. It is no use throwing away money."

Old Geronimo bowed his head gravely. He, too, was as avaricious as the Mexican; but in a different way. He was not willing to sacrifice his revenge for his avarice.

"Let us get all we can out of the dogs," he said. "But it must be got for the women. I will not consent to the selling of a single man fit for the torture. The wounded ones will take a good deal of time to get them well, and they are not worth much. You can treat for them, if you please. But there is one Yanqui, with a black beard, that shall not be ransomed. He will make us more fun, when we get him dancing in the fire, than all the rest. Besides he has such a fine beard, to hang him up to a tree while we shoot arrows at him."

And the old chief chuckled at the idea, while the alcalde said, in a tone of resignation:

"Well, I suppose you will have to take him if you want him; but the women, if these Yanquis are fools enough to ransom them, are better worth a hundred ponies apiece than they could be to keep for wives."

Old Geronimo nodded; but his son, with a look in his eye that told how he had been aroused, burst out:

"You can sell all the rest; but the black-eyed one is mine."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the messenger on the scene. The man with the flag had halted below the walls of the house, and was signaling that he wanted to speak.

The alcalde went to the edge of the *azotea*, and called out:

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

The man looked up, and showed a face that the Mexican recognized as that of a friend of his, from the other side of the river.

"I am Carlos Rivera; and I have come with a message from Don Solano de Pipa. He wishes to know if you will receive him and a few of his friends, who are coming to treat for the ransom of the ladies, taken into the charge of the great Republic of Mexico, two days ago. He is willing to pay handsomely for their release, and to give the whole credit in the negotiations to the valiant Alcalde of Candelero, Don Rafael Balderamos."

Rivera had made a neat little speech, and the alcalde could not help a smile of proud satisfaction, as he remembered that it was heard by his allies, and calculated to impress them with an idea of his importance.

So he answered at once with the utmost graciousness:

"Don Solano de Pipa will be very welcome. The great Republic of Mexico is the refuge of the oppressed; and her fame is world-wide. But I never heard the name of the gentleman before. Is he a stranger in this neighborhood?"

Carlos Rivera waved his hand, with a gesture implying that the question was a foolish one.

"Don Solano de Pipa is well known to all of us. He is the man who kills Indians, bare-handed, and throws ferocious bulls without the help of a lasso or a horse. He is the friend of the Spanish race; and when you see him, you will confess that he is worthy to be our champion."

Then the messenger turned his horse and rode off, while Don Rafael whistled thoughtfully to himself, as he recognized the portrait. He had an uneasy sense that the terrible giant, who had produced such demoralization among the men of Candelero, and had killed three of the best spadachins in Mexico, might prove a hard bargainer.

Old Geronimo had heard the message; and the moment that Rivera had turned his horse to go, he said to the alcalde, sharply:

"Remember that we will not allow any treating for the person of the Yanqui that is unwounded. He cannot be ransomed. You must be content with the women and the wounded men. The rest are ours; and as for the black-eyed woman, that my son has demanded for a wife, we will not let her go, short of a thousand ponies, so that he may be able to buy him as good a wife elsewhere."

The old chief was quite cool in his statement, and one would have thought that the purchase of a woman for a wife was an every-day occurrence with him, as indeed was the case.

The alcalde shivered, but answered as calmly as he could:

"That is for me to decide, gentlemen. The captives are mine, not yours. They are lodged in the *calabozo* of Candelero, and your men are camped some distance away. If you wish to overawe the strangers who are coming, you must make a show of force. I cannot give way, if there is not a good show that I am unable to resist your demands."

Young Geronimo was on his feet in a mo-

ment, with his father; and the old chief shouted excitedly:

"Dog of a Mexican, do you think you can cheat us? You shall have all the force that you need to frighten you; and if harm comes to Candelero, the fault will be yours, not ours."

Then they swept to the staircase, and the alcalde, with a sigh of relief, heard them clatter down the stairs, while he muttered:

"While they are away, I may get a chance to make a bargain, and who knows what may happen? Patience, and shuffle the cards!"

He was an old gambler, who trusted to luck; but he was at his wits' end what to do, if the Indians made a fight.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE OPENING OF THE TRADE.

THE two Indians, as soon as they got into the street of Candelero, made for their horses that stood by the posts in front of the gate and dashed away at full speed. The alcalde watched them as they went with an air of anxiety, and his eyes turned toward the river while he repeated to himself:

"If there are only enough of them, who knows what may happen?"

He knew that the main body of the Chiricahuas was encamped at a distance of about three miles in a place where they had plenty of grazing for their horses, so that he had that much in his favor, if it came to a fight with them. Before they got to the walls of Candelero he might get time to collect his own men and defend himself and his right to ransom the prisoners.

Don Rafael was a shrewd man, if not overburdened with courage, and he had laid his plans in case of a contest. He had seen at the time that Solid Sol cheated him out of his first ransom that there was a chance that the Indians might make a second raid while the country was still in confusion, and, if so, there was every chance that they would succeed better than they had the first time.

He himself had sent the spies to the fort who, under the guise of scouts, had given the false information which had drawn the troops up the river on a false scent. He had joined with the Indians in the second raid because he had heard from his own spies that the soldiers had returned and that there was every chance that they would prevent further raids.

He had obtained the surrender of the cowboys at Mesquite Ranch just in the nick of time, when the coming of the soldiers could not long be delayed, and he had heard of the way in which Solid Sol had run the pickets of the Indians.

In the confusion of the fight at the river he had taken his measures well for his own men, had escaped over the river with the prisoners when the Indians were hotly engaged with the soldiers, for he knew that such was the only time when he could get any opportunity to effect his purpose.

Once over the river in advance of the Indians he had transferred his prisoners to the *calabozo*, a strongly fortified building, with thick walls, which would resist the attack of any undisciplined body for a long time.

The village was not fortified, it is true, but every house was a little fortress in itself, and the fire which he could pour from the tops of the houses would, he thought, keep the Indians away from the streets, unless they were driven to desperation and utterly careless of danger.

Now, as soon as he had seen the two Geronimos safe out of the village, he hurried down and told the trumpeter of Candelero to sound the alarm, which brought out all the people with their brass *escopetas* and clattering swords, ready to fight their best for the defense of their property.

A few words explained to them the state of the case, and the Alcalde of Candelero had the pleasure of being cheered to the echo by men who swore that they were "ready to fight for the ransom that the Texans were going to pay them and defy all the Indians who could be found in Mexico."

They did not know how many of the Chiricahuas there were, but they were prepared to undergo a little danger for the sake of the promised ransom.

When the alcalde had seen that his men understood what was expected of them he repaired to the *calabozo* itself and awaited from its secure shelter the arrival of the ambassadors from the further side of the river and the Indian assault, if it should come.

He had not long to wait for either party. No sooner was he on the flat roof of the *calabozo*, behind the shelter of a stone battlement two feet thick, than he descried a troop of horsemen coming from the river, in whose gorgeous dresses and handsome steeds, he saw the persons of men of his own race, and not the shabbily-dressed cowboys, that he had learned to hate and fear at the same time.

At the head of the column, mounted on a great white mule, he saw the giant who had given him such a succession of fights a few days before, and a slight shudder crossed his frame. Then a sudden change of expression showed that

an idea had struck him, and he muttered to himself:

"Perhaps he will fight on our side, this time. If he does, I can afford to laugh at the Geronimos."

He turned his head in the direction of the Indian encampment, up the river, and saw in that direction that a great cloud of dust was already rising, showing that the Indians were getting ready for the fray, and that he had not long to wait.

But the Texan embassy was within a quarter of a mile of the village, while the Indians were at least three miles off; and he had time to do a good deal, while they were coming toward him.

He hastily sought out a white flag, which he hoisted on the top of the *calabozo*, and had the satisfaction to see that it was noticed by the coming Texans, who waved another in answer, and rode straight toward the *calabozo*.

In ten minutes more they were below the walls, when Don Solano, in the most polite manner, asked "whether he could have the pleasure of an interview with the Alcalde of Candelero," and Don Rafael, with equal politeness, invited him to a conference on the house-top.

The Yankee, with still greater ceremony, suggested that the conference might better take place "in the open air, in front of the *calabozo*, as he could not think of entering the house without the presence of the friends he had brought with him."

His answer was hailed with a murmur of approval from the Mexicans in his train, who had seen the dust up the river and began to be a little nervous already, at the prospect of a fight. The walls of the *calabozo* had an aspect of solidity that was not without its effect on them, and they wanted to be inside rather than outside.

Don Rafael hesitated a moment, and then said: "I am entirely willing to let the señors enter; but there is an obstacle in the way."

"What is that?" asked Don Solano.

The alcalde pointed up the river toward the cloud of dust that was already moving toward the village, and said:

"We wish it understood that the great Republic of Mexico has done its best to save the prisoners taken from bloodshed; but the Indians, whom nobody can control, have sworn that they will not give up the male prisoners, having the right to put them to the torture. If the señors from the other side of the river come into this house, it is expressly understood that they come to aid in the defense of the place against the savages, and that the action shall not be taken in prejudice to the rights of the Republic of Mexico to the ransom, which she has the right to demand for saving the lives of men and women, who would otherwise have been massacred."

Don Solano, who had a shrewd idea of what was going on, had been counting on just such a proposition. He had taken the measure of the Alcalde of Candelero, when he had been there before, and had found the key-note of the Mexican's character to be avarice. The fact that he had a disagreement with his Indian allies was of course not known to the Yankee, but he suspected that something had happened which made the presence of armed men from the other side of the river by no means unwelcome in Candelero.

The errand on which he had come was to get back the prisoners, at the least possible cost, and to cheat the Mexican, if he could do so, without danger. He knew that he could not depend on his men for a fight in the open field; but he had seen them fight well behind walls, and was by no means averse to having them within the defenses of the *calabozo*, if he could get them there, without embarrassing promises. So he waved his hand in a lordly way, and said:

"We are all men of civilization, and bound to resist the demands of lawless savages. Let the alcalde admit us to the *calabozo* and we will fight for him against these Indians. We recognize the fact that the prisoners belong to the Republic of Mexico, and not to the Indians. If the alcalde is not willing to let us in, without a promise, we are willing, on our part, to go back and to represent to the American Government that the people of Candelero are in league with the Indians and enemies of the great Yankee Nation."

This reply puzzled the alcalde, and before he could collect his thoughts sufficiently to make a rejoinder, Don Solano whispered to a man beside him, whose light complexion announced that he was no Mexican, and whom the whisper sent off, at a gallop, to the river.

The alcalde saw the man go, and demanded uneasily:

"What is that man, and where have you sent him?"

"I have sent him," replied the Yankee, "to the soldiers at Fort San Carlos. The commandant, at that post, told me, that if he could get accurate information to the effect that the American prisoners were within ten miles of the frontier line, he would bring his whole force over the river and take them from you. You know best, if you can afford to risk an attack from them."

"But that would be violating our soil," cried the alcalde, in a tone that he vainly tried to render steady.

Solano shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please about that. All I know is, that you have some of our friends in this *calaboza*, and that we intend to have them out, for a reasonable ransom. If you do not choose to hear reason we shall be forced to leave you to the mercies of the Indians, who are, I see, coming down the river to the attack, as fast as they can."

The alcalde turned his head, and saw that the cloud of dust was rising higher and higher, and that the words of his friend below were true. His avarice fought with his fear for awhile, and at last he cried out:

"How much will you give for the prisoners? We have five women and two men, wounded, with another quite whole and strong. He is the one that the Indians are determined to torture, and they will fight like devils if we do not give him up."

Solano listened, and his heart beat high as he heard that the men he had feared to be dead were actually alive, and that the women had not been given up to the savages.

"I will promise you," he said, "for each woman, ten ponies, and for the men twenty apiece. That is all that we will give. If you do not want to take that we will go back to the river at once, and on you will rest the responsibility of the slaughter that will ensue. Your Government does not sanction alliances with the Indians of the mountains."

The alcalde put out his hand entreatingly.

"Give me twenty ponies for each of the women, and the bargain is made," he cried. "The Republic of Mexico cannot be cheated with a beggarly half-score for a lady of such beauty as these."

Solano hesitated a moment, and then asked:

"If we say yes, will you let us in at once?"

"Yes!" cried the alcalde, as he saw that the Indians were coming so close that another five minutes would bring them into the village.

"Then we consent," cried Solano, and a shout went up from the Mexicans, who were growing very nervous about the Indians, and who saw, in the presence and help of the giant, a great boon and one which they were anxious to secure.

The alcalde made no further haggling about the matter; but called down to his men below, and the gates of the *calaboza* were flung open just in time to admit Solano and all his cavalcade into the court-yard, round which the building was constructed.

The *calaboza* was a relic of the old Spanish domination, and had been a monastery in its day. It was built round a court-yard, which would hold a hundred horses easily, while the walls were four feet thick, of solid stone, and the battlement at the top of the *azotea* was equally thick, and rose four feet above the level of the roof.

Before the Indians could get into the village, Solano and his well-armed troop of Mexican *vagueros* had entered, and were manning the battlements with a line of rifles. Solano himself went to the prison, in the center of the court, before he would take any steps for the defense, and ascertained that all the captives were there and unharmed, the ladies included.

Not till he had seen the door opened, and all these prisoners released, did he ascend to the battlements, and then he beheld the whole place full of Indians, to the number of nearly a thousand, riding round through the streets, at full speed, and firing their rifles with such rapidity that the Mexicans in the houses did not dare to show a head above the battlement.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A HOT FIGHT.

THE fury of the first attack was such that even the cool-headed Don Solano was impressed thereby and wished that he had not sent off as he had Curley Pink, who had been riding with him disguised as a Mexican. He had sent Curley because he knew that he had not another man in his train that would have dared to make the ride to the river alone; but now that the Texan was gone he wished him back, for his own men were quailing behind the stone battlements, and their white faces showed that if the Indians brought matters to a hand-to-hand fight there was every prospect that the Mexicans would give in and be slaughtered like sheep.

But the advantages of walls were not long in making themselves felt, even with the Mexicans. The yells of the Indians and their tempest of bullets did not hurt any one who crouched in shelter, and after a few minutes of the attack the most timid, finding that they still lived, began to take courage, incited thereto by the reckless way in which Solano walked by the edge of the battlements and exposed himself to the Indians as if courting death while, nevertheless, he was not hit.

The fact was Solano saw that he would have to encourage his men by an exposure of his own person or they would leave him.

He knew that the marksmanship of Indians from a galloping horse, even with rifles, could

not be very good at the distance at which they were firing at the time.

After a little he fired a shot himself from the battlement, taking the most deliberate aim possible, and when the Mexicans saw that he had brought down an Indian in full career they took heart of grace and began to fire themselves.

His own men had rifles, while the natives of Candelero were provided with an old-fashioned clumsy brass *escopeta* or blunderbuss which carries a handful of bullets and kicks like a young cannon.

But, firing from a house-top into a street, even the *escopeta* was an efficient weapon, and the shower of lead which greeted the Indians had its effect in clearing the streets for a time.

Not for long, however. In their very first assault they had got into one or two of the outlying houses in the village and had killed the inhabitants with a rapidity and skill that showed they were in earnest. The second time they came rushing in they made straight for the *calaboza* with a reckless disregard of life that showed they had determined to take the prisoners at any hazard.

Old Geronimo was at the head of the band, and as soon as they came to the gate they jumped off their horses and began to fire bullets into the thick planks as if determined to shatter them at once and make an entrance.

They did it with a system that Solano was surprised to see.

Twenty men at a time jumped close to the door and fired a volley into it till their rifles were empty, when they repeated the dose with their pistols and jumped out of the way to give place to a fresh set, who repeated the operation.

The whole street below the battlement of the *calaboza* was full of men waiting their turns, and all the while they fired they yelled in Spanish all sorts of threats on purpose to demoralize the Mexicans, whom they threatened with the most horrible vengeance.

They seemed to be perfectly mad with rage and utterly regardless of consequences, contrary to the usual custom of their race.

The Mexicans on the battlement began to quail again at the noise and the progress which the people below were making with the destruction of the gate when Solano, who saw that something had to be done to check the spreading panic, leaned over the edge of the battlement and fired his pistol at short range, shot after shot, into the Indians below, calling to the rest of the men to "do the same, and they would soon get rid of their foes."

Timidly and hesitatingly they did as he ordered; but when they saw that their fire was actually efficacious, they began to take courage, and soon cleared the doorway of all its assailants, without the loss of a man on the top of the house. The danger, in fact, was but small to them, in their sheltered position; and the yells and wild behavior of the Indians, with their own fears, were the worst evils that the Yankee chief of the defense had to contend with.

The shots from his pistol could not fail to take effect at such a short distance; and those of the Mexicans were equally efficacious. All the desperation that the Indians could muster, would not enable them to penetrate the defenses of the *calaboza*; and the end of the matter was that they fled in a hurry, and devoted their efforts to other parts of the village, where the Yankee was not found to give energy to the defenders.

Here they fared much better; for the doors of the buildings were not strong enough to resist them, and before long nearly a dozen houses, immediately around the *calaboza*, had been forced; their defenders thrown over the walls into the street; while the Indians, now in full confidence that they were going to have their own way, began to fire at the roof of the *calaboza*, from a level, instead of being compelled to attack it at a disadvantage.

From that moment the Mexicans in the *calaboza* began to droop again; for the bullets of the besiegers came rattling over the edge of the battlements, and a few of the defenders were wounded.

Solano began to look anxiously across the river, from which quarter he expected the troops, if the message sent by the mouth of Curley Pink reached them in time. But he saw no signs of troops; and as he was revolving in his own mind what he should do to put heart into his craven men, the voice of Major Rhett came to his ears.

He looked round and saw the major, close to him, unarmed, just as he had been released from the *calaboza* prison. His big black beard, the appendage which the Indians had reckoned on as being such an advantage when they should use it to hang him to a tree, while they shot at him with arrows, was waving in the wind, and the major looked as handsome a warrior as the sun ever shone on.

"Tell ye what it is, Yank," he said, "if you and me don't do suthin' these Greasers are gwine to give in, and let the reds slaughter 'em like sheep. Ye can't trust a Greaser to stand up to the racket like white men."

Solano answered rather sharply:

"We came here to help you, major; and if you won't help, the blame will lie on you. Take a rifle from one of the wounded men, and show what you can do."

Rhett, with a glance of some surprise at the authoritative tone in which he was addressed, nevertheless obeyed, and took a rifle from the hands of a Mexican, who had just been struck down by a bullet from a neighboring house. His first shot brought down an Indian, who was taking aim; and from that moment the Texan, by the force of his example, did wonders to give courage to the defenders of the *calaboza*, who now began to feel the severity of the enemy's fire, which came from all quarters of the compass.

The smoke grew thicker and thicker round the *calaboza*, till the outlines of the surrounding country could no longer be discerned, and under its cover the Indians renewed their assault on the door below, which finally yielded to their efforts.

The Mexicans on the roof, driven to desperation when they found that the Indians had cut off all chance of escape, began at last to fight like men who knew there was no hope in defeat; and the whole body of the *calaboza* became filled with a crowd of men, firing and stabbing, shouting and cursing, till it resembled a pandemonium.

The women prisoners, who had been in the prison, had been brought on the roof, and were cowering in a corner of the battlement; while Solano and Rhett, at the head of the stairway, were defending the opening with desperate tenacity.

Then suddenly, in the midst of the confusion, came the thundering roar of a volley below, followed by the well-known Northern cheer, and in five minutes after the village of Candelero was clear of every vestige of an Indian; while the whole of the cavalry regiment, from Fort San Carlos, was in possession of the place, and the skirmishers were driving the Chiricahuas back to the mountains.

The fight was over at last.

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

TEN years after the date of the raid in Mesquite county, from which the inhabitants reckoned their events for a long time, the ranch that had once been the property of Colonel Bigbee could hardly have been recognized as the same place where the Yankee tramp had turned up, as a stowaway from a freight-train. The great plains, which had then been desolate, roamed over by herds of scraggy, long-horned "Texans," were now covered with waving grass of cultivated varieties, which had long ago superseded the weeds and mesquite bushes in which it had formerly rejoiced.

The miserable huts into which the cowboys had been wont to creep in times past, when they sought the shelter of a roof, which was only when a "Norther" made exposure sure death, had been replaced, in the neighborhood of the corral which had witnessed their heroic defense, by a row of neat cottages, whose gardens and window-curtains gave evidence of the fact that the cowboys on that ranch were no longer, as a rule, the miserable bachelors they had been in former times, when the pistol was the only law listened to in Texas.

The log-house, that had once been the most pretentious building on the ranch, as the abode of the owner, the same which the Indians had burned down in the raid, had been replaced by a brick house, which, by the fact of the windows of the lower stories being guarded with iron shutters, while loop-holes were marked at intervals on the wall, showed that the lesson of the Mexican haciendas had not been forgotten, and that the new ranch-house was capable of defense in case the Indians should come that way again.

But the aspect of defense in the house was contradicted by the otherwise peaceful character of the landscape, which had changed from the wild and half-savage aspect it had been wont to wear in the days of the cattle-kings. The old fault of the South, in sticking to one staple, seemed to have been remedied on Mesquite Ranch. Beef alone was no longer king; but there were fences to be seen, dividing the ranch into fields, in which not only beef cattle, but milch cows, sheep and hogs were feeding. The wasteful rule of the cattle-king had given place to that of the enlightened farmer, who makes use of all the products of the soil, and trusts no single staple for the whole of his capital.

Colonel Bigbee, his beard gray, supporting his steps on a heavy cane that showed his lameness, was walking slowly from the door of the house to the gate of a regular barnyard, such as could be seen in a Northern State, to meet a tall man, with a huge yellow beard, who was beckoning to the colonel, as if he wished to consult with him on some matter of farm economy.

As the colonel went down the neat, graveled walk, which would have been such a wonder in the old days of the canning-shed, the front door opened, and a lady looked out, and called after him:

"Don't be long, Cousin John, and tell Sol to

come to dinner. It will be on the table in five minutes from now, by the clock."

A smile illumined the face of the colonel, as he said:

"Ay, ay, Bessie; we'll be thar."

He hadn't lost his Southern accent yet; but the way in which he spoke to Sol Piper—for such was the man with the yellow beard, ten years older than when he came to the ranch—was one which he would no more have used to a man of Northern birth, ten years before that day, than he would have thought of flying.

"Good-morning, Sol," he said. "Haow are the caows doin'?"

He spoke as if to an equal, and shook hands as he spoke, while Sol, in the same manner, gave him all the points of interest in the management of the farm, and added:

"I came by the Guadalupe Ranch, this morning, John, and the major's babies are doing well. He says he's going to name the boy Sol, after me, and the girl Bessie, after my wife."

Bigbee smiled, as one well pleased, as he answered:

"What difference! Hey, Sol? I remember the time when George Rhett would as soon have thought of namin' a child of his arter Benedict Arnold as arter a Yank; and naow he's the hottest arter all the Yank improvements that ever was. Haow's Clara?"

"Going on nicely," was the response. "Rhett told me"—and here he lowered his voice to a tone of confidence, "that 'twas she that made him promise to give them the name. She said that they both owed their lives to the Yanks, and that the least they could do was to show their gratitude by giving them civility in future. Ain't that Bess by the door, there, John?"

Bigbee looked round and saw the figure of the mistress of the ranch-house by the back door, looking out toward the barn-yard, while she held a bell in her hand.

"That's Cousin Bess," he said, "and she told me to tell you that dinner is ready."

Then, as they walked toward the house, he added, thoughtfully:

"Do you know, Sol, I often think of the way you first came to the ranch, and haow you fooled us all. Sometimes I think that, ef you hadn't put on so many airs of bein' ignorant, we might have taken to you much quicker than we did; but it all turned out for the best, arter all. Sence you've been managin' the ranch the income has doubled and the comfort trebled, while we haven't had an Indian raid ever since the day the troops crossed the river to whip 'em."

"Do you know the reason?" asked Sol.

The colonel shook his head dubiously.

"It's just because you Texans, in this part of the State, found out that, if a man belongs to a country, the best thing he can do is to stick by it, and help the Government, instead of doing all he can to cripple it. As long as the men in this part of Texas staid at home, scowling at every one who came from another State to help you, and treating him as an enemy, you had no friends. The very troops were afraid to trust you as scouts, for fear of getting false reports, and had to depend on the Mexicans for all that service. Sence your eyes were opened, and you found out that Yankees came of the same stock as yourselves, and could fight as well on occasion, if the occasion were great enough, things have changed. The pistol is well enough in its place; but that place is not to settle little quarrels over trifles. The men that are always ready to appeal to it in such cases have nothing left when a grand emergency comes."

"But the sentiment of honor must be preserved," objected the colonel, whose ancient notions of chivalry had not all vanished. "Gentlemen cannot engage in rough-and-tumble fights, and the pistol is a great teacher of politeness."

"Granted," replied Sol, good-humoredly; "but the trouble is that, when a man thinks he can out-shoot anybody round him, the pistol becomes an implement of tyranny worse than brute strength. But, thank God, that is all over now. North and South have found out that life is not worth living if there is not some notion of give and take. And how is my darling to-day?"

He ended in this very inconsequential manner, as his wife, once the golden-haired Bessie Bell, whose life he had saved from the Indians, came from the door to meet him, and the colonel gave a half-sigh, half-smile as he noted the affectionate way in which this couple, who had been nine years married, made love to each other as fondly as ever.

But dinner-time put an end to all the little billings and cooings which are so agreeable to the participants and so tiresome to the spectators, and we cannot do better than leave the personages we have followed so far in the state of quiet happiness that had supervened on so many trials.

Colonel Bigbee had been so severely hurt in the raid of the Indians that he had been compelled to give up the active management of the ranch to Sol Piper, whom he had first appointed overseer, and afterward taken into partnership, with a share in the profits. Under the control of the shrewd New Hampshire Yankee, the Mesquite Ranch, in five years, had more than re-

covered from the blow inflicted in the raid; and the neighbors of the county, seeing what prosperity resulted from improved methods, had followed the example of the owner. In a place where it had been the boast of the inhabitants that they had "driven out every Yankee who had ever entered Texas," Northern men became as numerous as men born in the State, and the result had been that Mesquite county had become noted as the richest in the South.

Solid Sol married Bessie Bell the year after the raid; Major Rhett took to his house the once proud Clara Nunez, and became the staunchest advocate of Northern improvements to be found in the State of Texas; and the end of the matter was that the old wasteful ways which had prevailed when the scraggy Texan cattle roamed at large had vanished entirely.

Improved breeds of cattle had come in, fences and stables had changed their wild habits to the tameness of animals in the Northern States, and the only difference that could be found between Mesquite county, Texas, and the richest in the Genesee Valley was that the glorious climate made the yield of everything half as heavy again as could be hoped for under the frigid skies of the North.

Curley Pink who had always been the most liberal of the men on the Mesquite Ranch, had become overseer when Sol was made partner and had married a Northern girl, while little Pepper, who had recovered from the injuries he had received from the Indians, only to find himself a helpless cripple, was pensioned off with an easy berth where he had only to ride at about a footpace and report the time of the bands at their various work.

The Yankee tramp who had entered Texas from a Freight train in rags had effected the change, almost unaided, by unflinching courage and honesty, and the sentiment of Major Rhett whenever he spoke of him echoed that of every wise man in the South when he said:

"The best thing that could happen to us would be to have more of just such men."

THE END.

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